Prologue

Sam took Leroy by the hand, walking upstairs with him.

Sam opened the door for Leroy, closing it quietly once they were both inside. He leant back against the door, smiling at Leroy shyly.

Leroy watched him; reaching out to Sam and grasping him by the front of his shirt, pulling him towards him before turning, and pushing him slowly back onto the bed. He crawled forwards, leaning over him on all fours.

'Are you sure you want to do this?' Leroy asked him.

'Yes' Sam breathed. 'I want to…love you…to feel you…' he smiled. 'I want this' he whispered, 'I want to…feel you inside me.'

Sam reached up, brushing Leroy's cheek tenderly, running his fingers through his hair, before letting his hand fall back down to the bed, laying there beneath Leroy, calmly, simply waiting.

Leroy leant forwards, caressing Sam's cheeks with both hands as he moved forwards, his lips hovering over Sam's. He paused only briefly before kissing him.

Sam moaned as Leroy moved his tongue inside him, grasping Sam's arm with one hand, and with the other, slipping beneath his belt.

Sam broke away from him, craning his head back, his body shuddering, his breath in shallow gasps.

Leroy withdrew his hand, unbuckling Sam's belt, with the other hand he lifted Sam's shirt to expose his bare chest.

'You're so handsome' Leroy whispered, running his tongue across naked skin. 'So perfect.'

He leant back, sitting up so that he could see Sam's face clearly.

'Don't worry' he said. 'I won't mark you.'

'I wouldn't mind if you did' Sam mumbled back, cheeks flushed as Leroy continued to touch him down below, caressing him so tenderly. 'I am yours…' he breathed, 'after all…'

Leroy pulled his hand back, grasping the top of his trousers and pulling them down, freeing Sam from them and throwing them aside.

He leant over Sam again, kissing him briefly, before whispering into his ear.

'Turn over.'

Sam did so, and Leroy ran his hands over his body, nuzzling into his shoulder and smelling his scent as he unzipped his own trousers.

‘Relax’ he told him. ‘I’ll be gentle.’

Sam drew a sharp intake of breath, balling the sheets up in his hands as Leroy pushed forwards, reaching further into him as he leant over Sam, weaving his fingers between Sam’s, as he moaned in pain, and in pleasure.

Leroy’s body began to sweat in the hot room, but he did not slow his pace as he thrust into him.

Leroy continued, enjoying every inch of Sam’s body, owning him. Controlling him.

He quickened as he began to climax, throwing his head back as his finished.

They lay on the bed together after that, holding each other close.

‘I love you Leroy’ Sam told him. ‘I love you...’

Leroy squeezed him tighter, closing his eyes content as he felt a strange emotion inside at hearing these words.

‘I know’ Leroy whispered quietly to Sam.

A lot has changed throughout my life, and I haven’t always been as happy as I am now.

I love Sam dearly, he is everything to me, and meeting him was one of the best things that has ever happened to me….

However…my story began not with him

but with another…

Part 1

Three years ago

Chapter One

‘I like this one’ she said, pointing to the picture of green curtains in the magazine before her. Ken leant forwards with his elbow on the table, resting his chin on his palm.

‘Isn't it a bit too early to start planning things like this?’ Ken asked her happily.

‘It’s never too early’ Alyssa giggled, closing the magazine and pushing it to one side. ‘I can’t wait for us to get a place together; your parents say it will be soon.’

‘And are your parents still ok with this?’ Ken asked her. ‘I mean…they don’t think I'm taking you away from them or anything like that do they?’

‘You're a good man’ Alyssa gleamed at him, ‘and your family are good people.’

‘Oh stop’ Ken mumbled shyly, picking up his cup of coffee and sipping at it. ‘You're really too good to me.’

‘You're good to me’ Alyssa said to him, reaching for his hand across the table and grasping it firmly in her own. ‘Very soon we’ll have a house of our own and children. Our parents have it all planned out.’

‘And…’ Ken asked slowly. ‘Is that what you want?’

‘Yes of course it is’ she gleamed without hesitation, looking ever more beautiful as she smiled. Her long corn coloured hair fell about her shoulders, as her blue eyes shone from the light through the window outside. ‘My parents said to me it’s what a woman should do. Find a good man to marry and have children with. This is my life’s dream.’

‘As is mine’ Ken smiled, grasping her hand in both his own now. ‘Have you finished?’ he asked her as she dabbed at her lips with her napkin, doing so in a very feminine fashion. ‘Would you like anything else?’

‘No thank you’ she replied, folding up the magazine and slipping it into her bag before rising to her feet. ‘Let’s go.’

He offered her his arm like a gentleman should, and together they left the coffeehouse.

It was a gentle day outside. It was midday. The sun was warm and the air still. Everything was peaceful around them, even the town itself seemed hushed.

Everything was calm….well….almost.

Ken suddenly heard a ruckus coming from across the road. He turned to glance back behind him, seeing what it was.

From the entrance to a club that Ken was unfamiliar with, out stumbled a small group of male figures, the liveliest of which was a young man with rose red hair Ken would have described as being like a woman’s. Short at the top and long at the back, long enough to tie into a ponytail. Ken paused for a moment, watching this lively and rowdy figure as he clung to several of the men around him; clearly he was drunk, as were the men around him.

At midday! Ken thought.

He watched as the man with long red hair straightened suddenly, pulling himself up against the man closest to him. He then kissed him, hand travelling down the man’s body and touching his crotch.

Disgusting. Ken visibly flinched at the sight of this. *Such sordid behaviour is bad enough behind closed doors…but to do it out in the open….?!*

‘Are you alright Ken?’ Alyssa asked turning back. She then gasped at the sight of the men, hand going to her mouth in shock.

‘Don’t look’ Ken said to her in a sharp tone. ‘Lost souls deserve only hell. We shouldn’t have anything to do with them.’

He pulled her away.

They parted ways hours later when the light began to fade.

‘I had fun today’ Alyssa said. ‘I hope we can do it again soon.’

‘I hope so too’ Ken smiled warmly.

She reached forwards and kissed him, Ken held her in his arms tenderly, his hands around her waist.

They broke apart.

‘I love you Ken’ she whispered to him. ‘I always will.’

‘I know.’

‘Will we see each other again tomorrow?’

‘I hope so.’

She giggled shyly, hand going to her mouth.

‘Bye then’ she said.

‘See you.’

She turned and skipped away. Ken watched her until she reached the front door to her home, waving at him one last time before closing the door.

Ken waved back, before letting his hand drop. He moved away, heading to his own home on the other side of town.

He insisted on walking her home every time they parted ways, as every gentleman should. He would treat her right, and give her the life she deserved.

I love her Ken thought. *I want to spend the rest of my life with her*.

The sun had just dipped below the horizon by the time Ken reached his home. He lived on the ground floor in a small apartment block. It was a modest home, but comfortable. He lived here with his family, and had everything he needed. He was happy.

He rang the doorbell before he entered, just to let his parents know he’d come home. As was his habit.

They looked up as he entered, both smiling at him.

‘Welcome home Ken. Did you have fun out with Alyssa?’

‘Yeah’ he said taking off his shoes.

He sat at the table opposite his older brother and younger sister. Their names were Walter and Sue.

‘What's for food?’ he asked.

‘Lasagne’ his mother said, placing it on the table. ‘You timed it well.’

‘Just lucky I guess’ Ken smirked, picking up his fork eagerly.

His father sat at the head of the table silently as his mother dished up a portion for each of them. When she was done, she sat in the chair beside her husband and placed her hands together. The others followed suit.

His mother said a quick prayer and amen before allowing her family to eat.

When they were finished, Ken helped his mother clear the table.

‘Ken’ she said to him. ‘I know it’s late, but can you go out to the shops and get some bread and milk.’

‘Sure. But are they still open at this time?’ he asked her.

‘They're open til ten’ she told him. ‘If you hurry…’

Ken was already heading towards the door. ‘Don’t worry’ he said grinning back at her. ‘I’ll make it.’

He ran from his home, his pace slowed to a jog as he reached the shop. He made it just in time, five minutes before closing.

He bought what he needed and walked home slowly.

It was dark now, and only by the lights from the street lamps was he able to see as they lit his path.

It was silent in the town now, peaceful. Ken loved this place he lived. His life was perfect, his future bright.

Everything is planned out Ken thought happily to himself as he strolled home.

He had nearly reached his front door when he came across a figure.

The figure stopped. A flicker of recognition crossed his face.

‘Hey it’s you’ the figure said. ‘I saw you earlier today.’

Ken frowned. The stranger was perhaps only a little older than him. His red dyed hair was short and spiked at the top, and on the bottom it was long and tied in a ponytail that grew at the back.

Ken recognised him.

‘You're that guy I saw earlier outside that club.’

‘The name’s Mustang’ he said, tilting his head at him.

Ken stared at him for several seconds, before bursting out into hysterical laughter.

‘Mustang?!’ he cackled. ‘That is the stupidest name I've ever heard!’

‘Oh yeah?’ Mustang glowered indignantly. ‘Well what's your name then?’

He composed himself before answering, wiping away a tear.

‘My name? It’s Ken. My parents call me Kenneth.’

‘AAAAAHAHAHAHAHAAAAAAAA!’

Mustang doubled over, holding his sides. His laughter was so hysterical, that he actually fell to the floor and started rolling around.

‘Hey it’s not funny’ Ken glared angrily, as Mustang rose to his feet.

Mustang swayed on the spot for several seconds, before finally straightening.

‘I'm sorry…’ he gasped. ‘I'm sorry….I…..AHAHAHAHAHAAA*HAWWWWW!*’

‘You're so annoying’ Ken grumbled at him, gritting his teeth.

Mustang faltered then. He suddenly gave a look that Ken couldn’t read, and one he didn’t like.

Mustang reached for him then, taking him by the shirt.

He pulled him closer, and kissed him on the lips.

Ken's eyes widened in shock. He couldn't believe what Mustang had just done.

Ken shoved him away, hand going to his mouth.

'What are you doing?!!!'

'Kissing you' Mustang said casually, in a tone that suggested it was obvious. 'You know what that is right?'

The window of the apartment on the second floor nearby suddenly opened then, and a head popped out.

'Mustang? Is that you?' a man called down to him. 'Hurry up and get in here. I've been waiting!'

'I'll be there in a moment' Mustang called up to him. He looked back at Ken then. 'He's my boyfriend.'

Ken's heart jolted at the casual way he had said this.

As if it were normal?

'How can you say such things to me?' Ken spluttered, hand still covering his mouth as if to protect himself, as he if thought that Mustang might do it again.

'I thought you might be wondering who he was' Mustang said innocently.

'I don't care' Ken spat angrily. 'Why do you think I would care?!'

His voice was muffled as he spoke behind his hand.

'Well' Mustang smirked at him as he turned to go. 'I'll see you around.'

Yeah right Ken thought angrily. *As if I'd ever want to see you again.*

He watched as Mustang ascended the stairs to the next level above him. Only once he had entered the apartment and closed the door after him did Ken move his hand, breathing a deep sigh of relief.

That jerk. What was that all about? I can't believe he did that to me!

He picked up the grocery bag he had dropped and turned back to his own home, cheeks flushed red with rage.

It was silent in the house when first he entered, and the lights were all off. He took off his shoes and quietly put the bread and milk away, finding his mother in the next room watching TV with the lights off.

'Oh honey' she said in a sleepy voice. 'You're back…good. Is everything alright? Did you get what we needed?'

'Yes' he answered shortly. 'Everything fine. I'm going to my room ok?'

'Are you ok?' she asked with concern in her voice.

‘Yeah I’m fine’ Ken forced a smile. ‘I’m just tired.’

‘Alright then. Goodnight dear’ his mother smiled wearily after him.

Ken went to his room and closed the door after him, leaning back against the door with a hand over his mouth.

I can’t believe he did that…

‘Who was that kid?’ Justin asked as Mustang entered the room.

‘Oh…’ Mustang thought. ‘He’s…a kid in my class I think. I saw him earlier today.’

‘Does he live near here?’

‘I think so. I mean I guess he does.’

Mustang’s hands came up, holding Justin’s face tenderly as he kissed him.

‘I'm glad it’s just us again’ Justin said seductively as Mustang moved his lips down his body.

‘Yeah’ Mustang spoke between kisses. ‘Me too.’

Mustang turned him over, bending him over the sofa and trailing kisses down his naked back.

‘Do you want the safe word?’ Mustang asked him quietly.

‘You never tell me what it is’ Justin replied with a smirk.

Chapter Two

The next morning Ken went to school.

Along the way he came across a familiar figure.

Ken’s lip curled in disgust as he sneered down at Mustang, half-asleep on a bench and blinking blearily up at him, dribbling.

‘Oooozat?’

‘You're a disgrace’ Ken spat down at him.

Mustang’s vision must have cleared somewhat then, because his face suddenly lit up.

‘Kenneth! My man!’

He tried to rise, instead his hand slipped and he face planted the bench, before rolling off the side and onto the floor.

He rolled onto his back, gazing up at Ken.

‘You're hung over’ Ken told him.

‘No’ Mustang slurred. ‘I'm still drink.’

‘You mean drunk.’

Ken watched as Mustang struggled to his feet, flailing about on his back for several seconds like a tortoise flipped over, before using the bench as support and finally standing.

‘Shouldn’t you be going to school?’ Ken asked him.

‘I only go when I feel like it’ Mustang grumbled, clutching his head with a hand. ‘And today…I just don’t feel up to it.’

‘You make me sick’ Ken spat at him. ‘Don’t you care about your future?’

Mustang stared at him in shock, suddenly frozen, still holding onto the bench for support.

Ken turned on his heel, walking away. He left Mustang behind.

He didn’t know what it was, but there was something about him that got under his skin. He had seen delinquents before, but this…

His mood brightened only when he reached the school gates and found Alyssa waiting for him.

When she saw him she broke into a smile, looking ever more beautiful.

Ken smiled at her in turn.

*

The rest of that day was normal.

*

‘Bowling?’ Ken asked. ‘Tonight?’

‘Now’ Chris grinned at him. ‘You're not doing anything are you?’

‘Um’ Ken hesitated. ‘No?’ he smiled. ‘Let me just call home…I don’t want my family to worry.’

‘Do it on the way’ Chris said taking a step back and beaconing him to follow. ‘Come on. Anthony and Neil are coming too, and Sue…oh and Lisa is coming too.’

‘Oh right’ Ken mumbled, pulling his mobile out and dialling for home.

Chris fell silent as Ken spoke to his mother, telling her he will be home late.

‘I love you too mum’ Ken sighed happily at her. ‘Bye now.

‘Why don’t you invite Alyssa?’ Chris asked him, as Ken put his phone back in his pocket.

‘No she’s busy’ Ken said to him, ‘she’s got other plans.’

‘Aww, that’s a shame.’

Chris grabbed onto a lamppost as they went, swinging around it once before walking ahead again.

‘So are you any good at bowling?’

Ken grinned at him.

‘Not really…sorry. I haven’t played since I was a kid. I bet I’ll be rubbish.’

‘Nah’ Chris waved away at him. ‘I’m probably more rubbish than you are. So was it a birthday party last time you played?’

‘Yeah’ Ken said. ‘My own.’

‘At least this time you can drink, just be careful on the way home ok?’

‘Sure whatever’ Ken smirked. ‘I could say the same back to you.’

They reached the brightly coloured building in the shopping centre, Chris jogging in through the doors to meet Lisa, lifting her in his arms and planting a kiss on her lips.

‘Looks like we’re all here’ Neil said as Ken approached them.

‘Hey Ken’ Sue smiled sweetly at him, ‘how are you doing?’

‘Great’ he nodded beaming back happily.

‘Aw?’ Sue whined. ‘Alyssa couldn’t make it?’

‘Sorry she’s got other plans’ Ken replied.

‘It doesn’t matter’ Neil said, ‘there’s always next time right? Come on sis’ he said to Sue. ‘The food there is delicious and I'm hungry. Let’s go.’

They spent hours that evening at the bowling alley, playing several games, talking and eating at the café nearby.

Life was normal, and Ken was happy.

It was dark by the time they left. Ken said his goodbyes, and made his way home alone.

It was quiet in the town, so still and peaceful. When he got home he found his mother waiting for him.

‘You're back’ she smiled at him.

‘Of course I'm back’ Ken laughed. ‘Why wouldn’t I be back?’

‘I was just worrying for you’ she said hugging him.

‘Mum I'm fine’ Ken told her flatly, frowning at her in amusement. ‘I'm not a kid anymore.’

‘You’ll always be my baby’ she gleamed happily.

Ken groaned loudly at that.

‘Alright. I'm going to bed now’ she said to him letting him go. ‘Goodnight my dear.’

‘Night mum’ he said, smiling at her.

He watched her go, listened to her footsteps up the stairs, then silence.

Ken stayed in the kitchen, making himself a bowl of cereal before going to bed.

*

The next day, Ken saw Mustang again. Not in the streets, but in his classroom.

Ken turned to glance behind him, seeing Mustang sitting a few seats back from him. The moment Mustang noticed Ken watching him, he flashed him a grin and a wink.

Ken glared at him, turning back around to face his desk.

That's it Ken thought bitterly. *I remember him now. He's the one who asked in sex ed. a few years ago why sperm tastes salty.*

A look of revulsion crossed his expression.

Disgusting. He is an abomination. For being gay, for being so crude…and having no self respect. He doesn't even bother coming to school at all on most days. Ken turned back to glance at Mustang. *Why did he come now? I haven't seen him in years.*

*

After class finished, Ken went to one of the fountains in the corridor to drink. When he straightened again, he saw Mustang standing before him.

He gritted his teeth angrily, turning away from him sharply and storming off.

It was several seconds later, when Ken realised there were footsteps following him.

He paused, turning around he saw Mustang was following him.

'Go away!'

'But I want to talk to you' Mustang said innocently.

'About what?'

'I was wondering why you wanted me to come to school. You know…the other day when we spoke. I was wondering…' he paused. 'Were you worried about me?'

I shouldn't even be talking to him Ken thought to himself.

'Of course you have to go to school. Have you no care for the future?'

'Actually' Mustang said shrugging, 'not really. I live for the now.'

'Your life is full of sin' Ken glowered. 'Is this how you want to live? Being hung over in the streets, the heavy drinking…the things you do with other men…'

Mustang narrowed his eyes.

'Does the fact that I'm gay bother you?'

'It's wrong.'

'Why? How can love be wrong? It's not like any of the people I fuck are underage.'

Ken spluttered at that, utterly revolted. 'The way you talk is disgusting!'

'Why?'

‘It’s wrong to use such words.’

‘Why?’

‘My parents taught me how to behave properly. We follow god’s word.’

Mustang pursed his lips, frowning at him.

After a long pause he spoke.

‘Soooooo…..god says it’s wrong to be gay….and to swear.’

‘It’s wrong to be gay’ Ken told him curtly.

‘Tell me’ Mustang said. ‘Do you always let people tell you what to think?’

Ken hesitated suddenly, caught off-guard.

‘I believe that we are all god’s children’ Mustang continued. ‘He loves us all, and made me who I am.’

Mustang turned on his heel then, and walked away without another word, leaving Ken staring after him.

I don’t let people tell me what to think. Ken thought, surprised to hear such words coming from Mustang.

Do I?

*

Ken met Alyssa later that day, after his classes had finished, he rushed over to her college, waiting for her outside the gates.

Her expression lit up when she saw him waiting there for her; she came bounding over to him.

‘I missed you so much!’ she squealed excitedly, hugging him as tight as she could and laughing happily. ‘My handsome man.’

‘Hey Alyssa’ he smiled down at her.

She tilted her head back, kissing him.

Ken closed his eyes, holding her in a firm embrace for a few moments, until they broke apart.

She leant back on her heels again, smiling up at him, looking so beautiful.

As he gazed down at her, a thought cut into his mind like a knife.

‘Tell me, do you always let people tell you what to think?’

Ken furrowed his brow then, suddenly angry at himself.

Why am I thinking of Mustang now?

‘Ken?’ Alyssa faltered, her smile fading from her lips. ‘What's wrong?’

‘Nothing’ Ken said hastily, ‘I just…’ he frowned to himself. ‘Do you think I let people tell me what to think?’

‘What?’ Alyssa blinked at him. ‘No. Why would you say that?’

‘It’s nothing’ Ken shook his head. ‘It’s just something someone at school said to me.’

‘Don’t let anyone make you feel negative about yourself’ Alyssa told him. ‘There will always be people out there who will wrongly judge you or try to make you feel bad about yourself.’

‘Yeah’ Ken mumbled, dipping his head. ‘I guess you're right.’

‘Come on’ Alyssa beamed at him, taking his hand. ‘Let’s go to the park, I want to share an ice cream with you.’

They stayed together for hours after that, walking hand in hand through the park. Everything just as it had always been, and yet to Ken it felt different.

‘Tell me, do you always let people tell you what to think?’

He couldn’t shake Mustang’s words from his mind, no matter how hard he tried.

At last it began to grow dark, and Ken walked Alyssa home, kissing her goodbye, before leaving her.

*

That night, Ken went home, and began to see fault in his life.

He sat down for a meal with his ‘perfect’ family. He was expected to say Amen before the meal, told off for putting his elbows on the table, pushed to finish his food when he said he was full, ignored when he tried to talk about school.

‘What's gotten into you today?’ his mother asked him after a time. ‘I don’t like this new you. You're making me feel like you're testing your boundaries, and testing my patience.’

After that he helped clear the table silently, going to bed early after washing the dishes and putting them away.

He lay in bed, hugging the sheets to him, and feeling thoroughly miserable.

What is happening to me? Why am I changing, why do I suddenly feel like this?

He gradually succumbed to sleep, waking the next morning, with the same feelings of guilt and uncertainty he had felt the night before.

He went downstairs to find his family around the table having breakfast, they were already all awake before him.

‘Morning sleepy’ his sister called out. ‘You're up later than usual.’

‘Morning Sue’ Ken smiled warmly at her, ‘listen…’ he began, addressing his family now. ‘I'm sorry…I…wasn’t in my right state of mind last night.’

‘It’s alright’ his mother spoke warmly to him. ‘We’re just glad you're better now.’

‘Yeah’ Ken mumbled, ‘I am…I'm fine now.’

Sue ran up to him then, hugging him tightly.

'I'm so glad!' she cried happily, 'I missed the old you…I'm glad you are you again!'

'Yeah' Walter grinned at him from across the table as they ate their cereal. 'We're all glad you're ok.'

Ken smiled genuinely then, hugging his sister back.

'My family' he sighed, 'that's all that really matters…'

*

Later that morning Ken left for college, meeting Alyssa at the front gates. They talked briefly as Ken walked with her to her own school, a little further away, parting with a kiss. Ken returned to his own college in good time.

He felt generally good about things, happy even as he made his way across the grounds to registration. In fact, he was in such a good mood, that he began to think thoughts he never had before, as his mind began to wander to Mustang.

Mustang was strangely understanding the other day when he said we are all god's children he pondered. *Damit why am I thinking of him again? Why can't I get him out of my head?* He frowned then. *Maybe I'm looking at this the wrong way. Maybe he isn't such a bad guy after all.*

And then he saw him. Mustang was lying on the grass of the school ground, on top of another man. The two wrapped were up in each other's arms and kissing passionately, in plain view of everyone.

I take that back Ken thought turning away sharply, his mood instantly souring. *The guy's a total jerk!*

Ken went to registration, waiting outside in the corridor for the teacher to arrive.

Minutes later Mustang came strolling along. Ken glared at the wall opposite him, ignoring the quiet murmur of the class around him as they waited for the door of the classroom to be opened.

'Oh hey Ken!' Mustang sang. 'You alright?'

Ken's heart sunk in his chest, and he closed his eyes in anguish, wishing Mustang would not have spoken to him, wishing he had just ignored him.

He opened his eyes, and turned slowly to face him.

'Why the long face?' Mustang asked him.

'Why won't you just leave me alone?' Ken snapped.

'Is it your time of the month?' Mustang asked in a sympathetic tone.

Ken's blood pressure instantly shot up, and he was consumed by a strong desire to smack him in the face.

'You're disgusting. I hate you so much' he said through gritted teeth, in a voice low enough so that only he could hear. 'My life is perfect. You are the one who is wrong. Why do you even come to school? You'd be doing everyone a favour by just staying away. You'd be doing everyone a favour by dying.'

Ken knew he had struck a nerve. For an instant Mustang's cocky and bold demeanour broke, and he looked genuinely hurt. Ken immediately regretted his words.

Mustang stared at him, mouth open in shock and eye wide. Ken could see, that his words had cut him deep.

Mustang closed his mouth, speaking at last.

'I thought for a moment….' Mustang said, 'that you actually cared for me….when you asked why I don't come to school.'

'No' Ken shook his head. 'I couldn't care less for you.'

He turned his back on him then as the teacher arrived to open the door, filing into the classroom and taking his seat like everybody else. He kept his eyes down from then on, ignoring everything around him, and speaking only to confirm his name, as the teacher read out the register.

He didn't know if Mustang had entered the class, didn't even notice whether or not he answered when his name was called out.

He was too angry, consumed in his own silent rage. He constantly felt annoyed by Mustang, though he had hardly spoken to him.

Chapter Three

Later that day, they sat a mock exam. The room in which the exam was held was modest in size. It was soundproof. Originally it had been a music room, but that was a long time ago.

Ken stared down at the paper before him, scribbling furiously. The mock exams were just as important to him as the real ones; they showed where you were doing well, and where you were failing. And if he didn't do well in his mock exams, his parents, his mother especially, would not be happy.

She had plans for him, and he was expected to follow them.

He wanted to please her, to make her happy. He wanted her to be proud of him.

Ken put all his efforts now on his task, his mind was focused solely on this. He didn't look around him, but stared down at his papers as he worked.

Behind him Mustang sat. He paid no attention to the test that was before him. Instead he spent his time drawing rude pictures all over the paper. Then when he grew bored of that, he folded the test into a paper aeroplane and threw it through the air.

Ken felt something jab the back of his head, and turned.

Everyone behind him was looking down, concentrating on their papers. Everyone, except for Mustang, who stared back at Ken; trying to adopt an expression of confused innocence and failing miserably at it.

Ken gritted his teeth, miming the words *piss off*, before turning ahead again.

He continued with his test for several minutes, the teacher standing at the head of the room, overlooking the students as they worked in silence.

For a long time nothing happened, and then the door opened, and a hooded man walked in.

Everybody in the room stopped and looked up, frozen for a moment.

'Excuse me' the teacher said striding up to the man. 'You're not allowed in here. Please leave.'

The man pulled out a gun, and shot her in the head at point blank range.

Everything seemed to move in slow motion, and the teacher fell back and collapsed on the floor.

She was dead.

People began to scream, rising from their seats to escape.

Ken was unable to move. He had frozen where he sat, consumed by fear.

The hooded man turned his attention onto him now. Ken's heart plummeted in his chest. The heightened fear he experienced, was unlike anything he thought possible. A primal fear. The true terror experienced by one who could see the end of their life right before their eyes.

Ken knew as the stranger reached for him, that he had mere seconds to live.

Ken was pulled from his chair and forced to his knees; the stranger pressed the gun to his temple.

'*GOD SOMEONE HELP ME!*' Ken screamed.

The stranger suddenly stumbled to the side and Ken threw his head back to see that Mustang had lunged for the man. They fought for the gun, Ken watched in frozen shock as Mustang struggled to take the gun from the stranger. Mustang forced the man's hand down and the gun

fired, Mustang grimaced in pain as he was shot through the leg. The stranger pushed Mustang back and the gun fired again.

Mustang staggered back, and fell to his knees, clutching his side. Ken turned to him, seeing blood seeping between his fingers from the open wound.

He had been shot in the stomach.

His attention flickered back to the stranger, who pointed the gun at Mustang now, inches away from his forehead. Mustang glared back at the stranger in hate and anger, but Ken was shocked to see that there was no fear in him. Not a trace.

Ken gasped slowly as he watched the stranger tighten his finger, pulling the trigger.

The gun clicked but did not fire. It was empty, and Mustang did not even flinch.

Several more figures ran into the room, tackling the hooded stranger and forcing the gun from his grasp.

The shouts around Ken sounded far away, distant…almost as if he were hearing them underwater. Ken paid no attention to them. He ignored the voices as they called all around him. His focus now was on Mustang, and Mustang alone.

Mustang hunched his body over, groaning in pain, his hand pressed against the ground as he held himself up, holding his stomach with his other hand.

'Mustang…' Ken uttered.

Mustang raised his head slowly, his body beginning to tremble. He groaned again, hanging his head and falling to his side.

'MUSTANG!'

Ken crawled over to him, leaning over him.

'Oh no….' he whimpered.

He was deathly pale now, his breathing shallow.

Tears welled in Ken's eyes as he stared down at him, rolling down his cheeks.

'Please don't die!'

'Get back give him space!'

Ken was pulled to his feet by one of the teachers as several other teachers surrounded Mustang.

'Call an ambulance!'

Ken stared down at the scene around him, feeling a sudden sense of unreality, like this wasn't really happening…like he wasn't really here, like this was just a horrible nightmare that he would soon wake from.

He heard suddenly screams and the sound of hysterical crying coming from the corridor outside.

This room is soundproof Ken thought vaguely. *He must have killed more before he came here.*

His attention drifted then to the stranger dressed in black. Ken was shocked to see that he was dead.

'They said it was a cyanide capsule that he had taken' Ken said in a distant voice as he sat there in the quiet room. 'They said that he was schizophrenic…and that the voices in his head told him to do it.'

'And what about Mustang?' the therapist asked him. 'You haven't heard what happened to him?'

'N-no' Ken whispered, his hand going to his head, and tears streaming from his eyes. 'I….I don't even know if he is alive….or dead…..*oh god*…' he buried his face in his hands. 'I suffer night terrors….I see it….play out in my mind all over again…again and again…its horrible….I see the gun…I see Mustang lying there….and the *blood'* Ken shuddered, hugging himself, beginning to tremble violently. 'My parents won't help me!' he said, voice breaking. 'They say I should just put my faith in god…. but….it was not god who saved me that day…but Mustang……I would have died if not for him!'

'Why do you think he did it?' the therapist asked him.

'I…I don't know.'

'Is it possible that he has stronger feelings for you than you thought?' the therapist asked him calmly. 'Positive feelings…an attachment of some sorts perhaps?'

Ken glanced up at the man.

'W-what…?'

Shortly after the incident, Ken had gone to the hospital Mustang had been admitted to to try to find him.

'Please' he had begged the woman. 'I have to know if he's ok.'

'I'm sorry' the secretary had said. 'We keep our patients files confidential, only the family are allowed to see.'

Ken returned to the entrance of the hospital, where his own family were waiting for him by the car, ready to take him home.

The days passed and Ken stayed at home. He had learned later on that several people in the school had been killed by the stranger before he entered the hall during their mock exam. The college had been closed for several days after that, reopening days later. Things went back to normal.

But Ken had not returned.

In his mind, Ken was still in that exam hall on that day. When he watched TV, gazed out the window, lay on his bed staring up at the ceiling, he saw in his mind what happened that day. No matter where he was or what was happening around him, he would see the same horror, play over in his mind again and again.

No matter what he did, he couldn't stop it, no matter what he did, it never went away.

'Ken?' Sue his young sister said to him as he lay on his bed silently. 'Ken are you ok? We're all worried about you?'

But he did not answer her.

Later that evening they all sat down for their meal.

They began to eat.

Ken stared down at his plate, eyes wide. He had not moved for several minutes, but just sat there, head bowed.

'Ken?' his mother spoke tentatively from beside him.

Ken turned his head to her, staring silently. She watched him with an expression of deep concern.

'Eat something' she told him. 'Please.'

Ken didn't respond. He made no acknowledgement that he had heard her at all.

'Here' his mother said, picking at the food with his fork and bringing it to him. 'Eat it' she told him gently, holding the fork before his mouth.

Ken opened his mouth and his mother fed him.

Ken chewed slowly; then swallowed.

He let out a sob then, bowing his head and leaning forwards with his elbows on the table, hands gripping his hair as he began to cry.

His mother reached for him and he turned to embrace her, crying into her shoulder until his eyes were red.

He was taken to bed early that night; his mother tucked him in, patting his sheets down tenderly.

Ken lay on his side, wearing the same wide eyed expression he had since that day.

'If there is anything you want' his mother told him brushing his hair back, 'just come to my room, it doesn't matter what time it is.' She waited for a response. None came. 'Sleep well' she told him, leaning down and kissing his forehead. 'I love you' she said. 'Good night.'

She moved away, pausing at the door to look back, before closing it after her.

It took hours for Ken to fall asleep. When he did, he dreamed of that hooded figure, of Mustang standing before him…that gun……blood….

Ken sat bolt upright in bed screaming. It took him several minutes to calm as he remembered where he was.

At home, in bed.

Ken hugged his knees, covering his head with his arms and crying, gasping as his whole body shook.

His door opened then and he jerked his head around, heart racing in his chest, pounding against his rib cage so hard it hurt.

'Ken?' came the delicate voice of his sister.

Behind her, the taller figure of his brother stood. Ken recognised his silhouette in the doorway, lit by the light in the hallway.

They moved over to him.

'It's alright' his sister told him. 'We're here for you.'

It was many weeks later when Ken returned to school.

'I can't believe this has happened…' Ken said in a distant voice as he stood before the memorial.

His friend Keith stood beside him, and together they stared at the fountain that had been built in memory of those that had died that day.

There were seventeen in total. Many of the families of the deceased had brought flowers and pictures of the loved ones they had lost.

The pictures were left to fade in the sunlight, and several of the flowers were slowly beginning to die.

'How can this happen?' Ken mumbled. 'It's just…so horrible…' he hung his head, shoulders hunched, as his body began to tremble. 'I thought…' he began, 'I thought….'

Ken bit his lip, doing so hard enough to make it bleed.
‘Have you seen or heard from Mustang at all?’ he asked his friend.
‘No’ Keith mumbled to him. ‘No one’s heard from him.’
Ken turned away sharply to hide the tears in his eyes.
He made his way slowly to class, thinking in his head.
Maybe….he did die after all.

He attended class. His mind however was far away, and he hardly heard the teacher speak. Instead, for the first half of the lesson, his eyes glazed over, as his thoughts began to drift, until the moment the classroom door opened.
Ken’s attention snapped sharply back, and he witnessed a flashback of that day when the door to the hall had opened, and the hooded figure stepped in with gun.
Ken clutched his head with both hands, screaming in horror at the sight of blood before him.
Around him, his classmates and the teacher that had walked in stared in shock. To them, everything was perfectly normal, save for Ken

Minutes later, Ken sat alone in the nurse’s office, head in his hands and shaking violently. There were several rooms here, and Ken had been left in a quiet room alone, where no one could bother him.
A short while later, Ken’s parents came to pick him up.
They took him home.

Chapter Four

Several months passed, and Ken still had not seen nor heard any news of Mustang.
He had begun to accept that he had died that day.
‘What's wrong?’ Alyssa spoke, breaking his thoughts.
‘Oh’ he mumbled, straightening slightly, ‘I um…its nothing.’
She stepped towards him, reaching out to hold him by the arm. Around them other people milled about in the dimmed room, the only light shone through the glass from inside the great aquarium before them.

Alyssa tilted her head back as the glass arched above them, reaching out towards it, touching its cool surface as a great stingray drifted above them, gliding gracefully through the water as it flapped its large wings slowly.

‘You're thinking about Mustang aren’t you’ Alyssa said.

‘Is it really that obvious?’ Ken asked glumly.

She lowered her arm, turning to face him.

‘There’s nothing you can do for him.’

‘He saved my life’ Ken said. ‘I would be dead if it wasn’t for him.’

‘I'm glad he saved you’ Alyssa said, ‘more than I can express, but…’ she paused then. ‘You will do no good by worrying like this.’

‘How can I not worry?’ Ken said, speaking quietly to her. He paused. ‘I sometimes…I think…’ He gritted his teeth, forcing himself to speak. ‘If he has really died…then it would be my fault.’

‘No’ Alyssa shook her head. ‘That isn’t true.’

Ken turned away from the aquarium before him, at last facing her properly.

‘He chose to confront that man’ Alyssa told him, ‘and while I thank god that he did…’ she faltered then, falling silent and smiling sadly at Ken. ‘If I lost you’ she whispered, ‘I would never…’

‘Don’t’ Ken said abruptly to her, caressing her cheek tenderly then, ‘don’t think of such things.’

‘I just don’t know what I would do if I lost you’ Alyssa finished. ‘You are everything to me; you are my whole world…’

Ken stopped her then with a kiss, holding her tenderly in his arms.

‘Alyssa…’ he breathed into her ear, his grasp tightened slightly and he bowed his head, nuzzling into her neck. ‘I love you so much…’

‘It makes you think…’ she mumbled, smiling over his shoulder as she held him back, ‘…how previous life is.’

Ken let go of her, stepping back as he held her shoulders, gazing down upon her.

‘You're so beautiful.’

She smiled, stepping forwards and pecking him quickly on the cheek playfully, before taking his hand and pulling him along.

‘Come on’ she said, ‘I want to see the baby jellyfish again.’

Ken frowned at her in amusement, unable to stop himself from smiling.

‘Everything will be ok in the end’ she told him briefly glancing back as she tugged him along, ‘just give it time…’

They left the aquarium a few hours later after having a meal in the café, heading back home on the train, Ken walked Alyssa home before returning home alone himself, where he found his family waiting for him.

‘Did you have fun?’ his mother asked.

‘Yeah’ Ken mumbled. ‘It’s fine.’

It was many weeks later, when Ken started going back to school on a regular basis. His visits with the therapist became less frequent, until he felt he no longer needed them at all as he began, a little more every day, to return to his regular routine.

As the days went on, the fear also began to ebb away, along with the restless nights, along with the terror.

Ken’s family did everything they could to support him, to help him heal, and slowly, Ken returned to his old self again.

One day, Ken received a call to his home from one of his friends, inviting him out.

‘You haven’t been out in ages’ his friends voice came to him from the phone. ‘I think it would be good for you. So how about it?’

Ken thought for a moment, holding the phone to his ear.

‘I think you should go’ his young sister encouraged; standing close beside him, she could hear the call.

Ken smiled warmly at her, before turning away.

‘Yeah.’ He said after a time speaking to his friend. ‘I’ll go.’

The next day, Ken went to college.

‘You're getting better.’ Alyssa said to him as they stood at the front gates of her school.

‘I feel better’ Ken smiled. ‘I really do.’

He grinned at her again, wider this time.

‘I think things are finally returning to normal.’

She kissed him on the cheek quickly, before turning and dancing away, pausing one last time to wave back at him, before vanishing.

Ken smiled after her, turning away and walking quickly back, heading to his own college. He met his friend who was waiting for him.

'Hey Ken' his friend Phil said. 'There you are. Hurry up or we'll be late.'

'Alright' he sighed. 'I'm coming.'

He followed his friend towards the school, passing through the gates.

Ken glanced behind him then, for no particular reason, perhaps doing so purely by chance, perhaps doing so because his subconscious sensed something there.

His heart stopped suddenly in his chest. What he saw then, suddenly brought all the terrible memories of what happened that day flooding back.

'Ken?' Phil paused. 'Are you alright?'

Ken ignored him, instead staring away, eyes wide and frozen as if in shock.

Ken moved away, taking a step forward.

He ran in the opposite direction, ignoring his friend who called after him. He ran across the road, stumbling to the side as a car skidded to a stop to avoid hitting him, though he didn't slow.

The figure he had be running after turned at the sound of the car skidding and the horn sounding from the angry driver. Ken ran to the figure, slowing to a stop before him with tears in his eyes, his chest rising and falling as he breathed deeply.

'Ken' Mustang said in surprise, staring down at him as he stood there casually with his hands in his pockets. 'What are you doing here?'

Ken stared at him, gasping.

He stepped forward then, embracing Mustang tightly.

Mustang blinked in surprise.

'Ken' he uttered, '…what?'

'You saved my life!' Ken sobbed into his chest. 'You saved my life…I would be dead if it wasn't for you!'

'Hey' Mustang said softly, placing his hands upon Ken's shoulders and pushing him back gently so that he could look into his face.

'You saved my life…' Ken cried, tears streaming from his eyes then, 'even after I said all those *horrible* things to you….'

'They were just words' Mustang answered quietly.

'But I said such terrible things…I wished you *dead*! Oh…' Ken said, suddenly remembering as his eyes travelled down Mustang's body. 'You were shot…'

'I'm fine now.'

Ken lifted his head again, beginning to tremble.
‘Come with me’ Mustang said to him. ‘Let’s take a walk.’

Chapter Five

Ken followed Mustang as they made their way through the town. Ken’s eyes were wide as he went, and he swallowed the lump in his throat, his nerves tingled inside him at the sudden sight of Mustang. It was a strange feeling, seeing him again after he had begun to accept that Mustang had likely died. Ken felt so confused.
‘You look different’ Ken spoke up.
Mustang paused, turning to him.
‘Do I?’ he asked. ‘How?’
‘I don’t know’ Ken mumbled. ‘You look the same…and yet…different….’
Mustang watched Ken for a moment, before breaking into a smile.
‘It’s just because I've been gone for so long’ he grinned. ‘I assure you I'm the same as I was before.’
‘Hu?’
‘It’s like…’ Mustang said slowly, ‘when you go on holiday for two weeks, your home looks and feels different when you come back, even though it’s all the same.’
‘I’ve…never been on holiday.’
‘You should go’ Mustang continued, turning and strolling away. ‘After all…life is short.’
They continued to walk at a casual pace through the town, across the streets and away, until they reached the edges of the town.
It was quieter here. Peaceful.
‘I like it here’ Mustang said, slowing to a stop and gazing about him with his hands upon his hips. ‘It’s nice.’
It was an open place, the dirt at their feet was dry, and train tracks were set in the earth at their feet, reaching far in both directions. And before them, was a narrow section of woodland, beyond which were the very edges of the town, where there were only fields.
‘Why are we here?’ Ken asked him curiously.
‘I told you’ Mustang said happily. ‘Because I like it.’ He turned to him them. ‘And…’ he added, ‘it’s private. We can talk without being disturbed.’

‘Why did you save me?’ Ken asked him, speaking the first question that had been hanging on the tip of his tongue. ‘Why? After what I said to you?’ he hung his head, fighting back tears as the terrible memories seeped back into him.

Our teacher…shot and killed right before us……the blood…oh god….

Ken raised his head again, facing Mustang head on, forcing the memories away, forcing himself to be strong.

‘I have to know’ Ken spoke, trying to keep his voice steady, ‘what were you thinking when you ran towards him?’

Mustang put his hands in his pockets. ‘You want to know what I was thinking?’ he asked

‘Yes’ Ken whispered.

Mustang glanced up at him.

Ken stared. ‘You have to tell me. What were you thinking?’

‘Fuck it’ Mustang replied. ‘YOLO.’

Ken stared at him in disbelief.

‘…What…?’ he uttered, the sound of the train in the distance coming closer.

Mustang turned and walked away, he slowly crossed the train tracks that ran by them, the train that was running the tracks was drawing ever closer.

Mustang stopped on the tracks, and turned to face Ken again, as the train drew ever closer.

‘This is the only life we all know we have’ Mustang said as the train tore forwards. ‘One life. One chance. If I can die making a difference in this world, then I will.’

The train was nearly upon him, it would reach him in seconds.

At the very last moment, Mustang stepped backwards off the track, never breaking eye contact with Ken, as his heart knotted in his chest, for the briefest instant he was afraid for Mustang.

The train passed between them, whooshing at high speed.

Then in no time at all, it was gone.

Ken stared at Mustang in shock.

Mustang stared back calmly.

He turned slowly, and walked away.

Ken followed after him.

‘How can you be this way?’ Ken asked Mustang in astonishment. ‘I've never known anyone to be so carefree in life, so willing to throw their life away.’

‘I wouldn’t throw my life away for nothing’ Mustang replied, as the pair walked side by side across the dry earth. The tracks were on one side of them as they went; the forest on the other. ‘I would give my life to save anyone in need. Anyone……even if they hated me.’

‘I don’t hate you’ Ken blurted suddenly, speaking louder than he intended. ‘I don’t.’

The pair had stopped then, watching each other for several seconds, before turning away from each other, and moving on.

‘That’s good’ Mustang spoke in a mumble after a time, ‘I'm glad……I don’t want you to hate me.’ He fell silent again. ‘But even if you did…’ he added hastily, ‘I would do it again. I would…’

‘But what if you really died?’ Ken asked him desperately. ‘What would your parents have thought……they would have been heartbroken?’

Mustang thought carefully before responding.

‘I am not controlled by my parents’ he said to Ken as they strolled along the dirt road. ‘My life is my own, and I will do with it as I please.’ He glanced sideways at Ken then, gleaming. ‘Live your life as you should’ he told him, ‘not how other want. Live in the moment.’

Ken watched his feet as he walked, listening in silence to Mustang’s words.

That’s good advice he thought to himself. *Surprisingly good advice……you are not the person I first thought you to be……you couldn’t be more different*.

‘I'm glad I met you’ Ken said, ‘and not just because you saved my life.’

‘Oh?’ Mustang said, pausing and turning to him. ‘Is that true?’

‘Yes’ Ken said. ‘You're…’ he stopped. ‘You’ve given me a new perspective on life……thank you.’

Mustang smirked then, looking incredibly smug.

‘No problem’ he said to Ken. ‘I think you’d like to know…that I'm glad I met you too.’

‘Really?’ Ken said, raising an eyebrow sceptically. ‘Why? What have I offered you that’s positive?’

‘Amusement’ Mustang winked. ‘I find you amusing. You are like a puzzle to me, a puzzle I try hard to work out. There is something about you that’s different…’ he frowned then, as if trying to work out what it was. ‘I feel…’ Mustang continued slowly, ‘that….’ he fell silent again. ‘I feel like you are not living the life you should’ he finished, ‘like you are living a self that you is not natural to you, like a false life……a life forced upon you by others around you.’

‘What?’ Ken whispered, blinking in confusion at these words.

Mustang waved him away.

‘Forget it…it’s probably nothing.’

Ken was about to speak then, to question Mustang as to what he meant.

But then they were interrupted.

A figure came sauntering up to them, calling and waving and he went.

‘Yoo-hoo!’

Mustang turned then, his expression immediately brightening at the sight of the red haired guy, with his slender frame and pretty face.

‘Ruby!’ Mustang called.

Ruby approached, instantly throwing himself into Mustang’s arms and kissing him deeply.

Ken turned away then, suddenly very interested in the clouds in the sky.

Hey that one looks like a duck.

Mustang managed to fend Ruby off for a brief moment, patting his chest in amusement, with one arm still around him as Ruby clung to him.

‘What are you doing here?’ Mustang asked him.

‘I came here to find you’ Ruby winked. ‘I thought you might be here. There are only so many places you like to hang out. It’s either somewhere along the railway, or the graveyard.’

‘You like the hang out in the graveyard?’ Ken asked raising an eyebrow and daring to look back at him.

Mustang glanced at him. Ken expected to hear a sarcastic comment, or perhaps for him to deny it. But Mustang said nothing.

‘I don’t want to take you away from your friend’ Ruby said, ‘but do you have time for me?’

Mustang hesitated.

‘You go on’ Ken told him. ‘I’ll talk to you another time.’

‘Are you sure?’ Mustang asked.

‘Yeah’ Ken said backing away. ‘You…go and have fun or something…or whatever you do’ he finished awkwardly in a small voice.

Mustang smirked then. ‘It was nice to see you again’ he told him, before turning away, his arm still around Ruby. ‘I mean it.’

Ken felt strangely flattered at that.

‘Hey!’ he called after Mustang as he began to walk away.

Mustang paused, glancing back.

‘I’d like to see you again’ Ken began uncomfortably. ‘I mean…to hang out…if you like…you know…if you're not busy.’

‘Sure’ Mustang gleamed. ‘It would be my pleasure.’

‘Good’ Ken sighed, his nervousness easing off slightly as he took a step back. ‘Well…bye then.’

He turned and walked swiftly in the other direction.

‘Who was that?’ Ruby asked curiously, watching Ken march quickly away.

‘Just a friend’ Mustang said casually. ‘At least I think he is…I'm not sure really, I think he used to hate me…but now…’

Ruby turned to him.

‘Is he gay?’

‘I don’t think so’ Mustang shook his head.

‘Oh’ Ruby said. ‘That’s a shame.’ He narrowed his eyes, watching Ken closely. ‘He is ever so handsome.’

Chapter Six

Mustang’s eyes flashed then. ‘Are you admiring him?’

‘Why?’ Ruby asked playfully. ‘Are you getting jealous?’

‘And what if I am?’ Mustang asked.

‘You're one to talk about jealousy’ Ruby frowned. ‘I will only ever love you. You on the other hand…’

Mustang cut off his last words then with a kiss, pushing him back into the forest.

‘Mustang’ Ruby giggled. ‘Not here.’

‘Why not?’ Mustang whispered seductively in his ear. ‘I can’t resist you.’

‘Can’t you at least wait until we get indoors?’ Ruby asked as Mustang pushed him against a tree.

Mustang bit his earlobe hard, Ruby flinching in pain as he did so.

‘No’ Mustang answered shortly, before taking Ruby by the hand and pulling him deeper into the forest.

He pushed him against another tree, now out of sight of the tracks.

Ruby moaned and threw his head back as Mustang kissed his neck, enveloped in his tight embrace.

Mustang slowly began to open his shirt as he trailed kisses down his naked chest.
Ruby began to shudder, his breath in light gasps as Mustang knelt before him, unzipping him.
Ruby gritted his teeth then, hands going to the tree behind him, nails scratching at the bark. His cheeks became red and flustered as his breath began to quicken.
Before him, Mustang worked hard, going straight to the back of his throat until he almost gagged.
'Mustang….' Ruby groaned after a time. 'I'm going to….'
Mustang's grip tightened on his thigh as he continued, pinching him until it hurt.
Ruby flinched, squeezing his eyes tight shut, gasping and moaning as Mustang finished him.
He let out a heavy breath as Mustang leant back, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.
Mustang smiled up at Ruby, rising to his feet. 'There's a good boy' he said.

Ken returned to the town, wandering the streets alone.
He wondered where he should go. He felt that it was too late to go back to school now, registration would already have finished. Perhaps he should go home. There was a chance the school had called home to tell his family that he was absent, perhaps they were beginning to worry.
Ken's stomach tightened nervously then as he thought of his mother. She would surely not be pleased with him.
He picked up his pace, heading home quickly.
When he entered through the front door, she was waiting for him.
'I'm so glad you're back' she said holding him tightly. 'I was beginning to worry…'
Ken held her back, tears in his eyes. 'I'm sorry mother….I….'
'Your teacher told us you failed to show up' his mother said, letting go of him and brushing the tears from his cheeks. 'I thought something terrible must have happened. You're not having flashbacks again are you?'
'No' he answered quickly. 'I haven't in ages….I'm fine…'
'Then why didn't you go to school? Your father and I have been so worried.'
'I just…' Ken mumbled. 'I don't know…I just couldn't….not today…'
His mother watched him sadly. She hugged him again, kissing him on the forehead before letting him go.
'Just stay here now' she said kindly to him. 'I'll get you something to eat.'
Ken spent the rest of the day watching TV, curled up with a blanket around him.

‘You shouldn’t sleep now’ his mother told him, ‘or else you won’t sleep tonight.’
‘It’s alright’ he said to her. ‘I'm not asleep.’
‘Are you sure you're alright?’ she asked him again. ‘You seem different now. Did something happen?’
Ken thought of Mustang suddenly, his cheeky grin, his carefree attitude…everything about him was stuck in his mind.

‘Why did you save me? Why? After what I said to you? I have to know…what were you thinking when you ran towards him?’
Mustang put his hands in his pockets.
‘Fuck it’ Mustang replied. ‘YOLO.’

‘This is the only life we all know we have. One life. One chance. If I can die making a difference in this world, then I will.’

‘I am not controlled by my parents. My life is my own, and I will do with it as I please.’

‘Live your life as you should’ he told him, ‘not how other want. Live in the moment’

Why? Ken thought urgently. *Why are you the way you are? What makes you be that way?*
‘I'm fine’ Ken mumbled to his mother. ‘Nothing’s happened…everything is fine I just….don’t feel myself at the moment…’
He sighed, resting his head against the pillow. His mother watched him with concern, but left him alone, thinking perhaps that he needed his peace.

That night, Ken woke up in terror, seeing in his mind again the flashback of that terrible day.
The hooded figure…the gun…the blood…
‘Oh god….’ Ken rasped, hand going to his head as he began to shiver violently, his body in cold sweat. ‘I thought I was over this…’

The door to his room opened then, and his brother stood there.

‘Are you alright?’ he asked Ken with concern.

‘Yes’ Ken answered hastily. ‘I'm sorry to wake you. Go back to bed.’

‘I heard you scream’ his brother said. ‘Are you having night-terrors again?’

‘Yeah’ Ken replied reluctantly.

‘I thought you were over them.’

‘Me too.’ Ken turned to him. ‘You should go to bed. I don’t want to keep you up.’

‘As long as you're sure you're ok.’

‘Yeah’ Ken nodded. ‘I'm fine.’

His brother lingered a moment longer, then went away.

The door closed, and Ken was left alone again.

‘Why?’ Ken whispered, head in his hands. ‘Why is this happening again?’

His heart jolted then as he realised something.

Mustang……could Mustang be the reason I'm having these nightmares again?

Weeks pass

‘You haven’t seen him since the incident’ the therapist said. ‘It makes perfect sense you are having these dreams again. He’s triggered these memories in you…he was the one who saved you that day…he is a very important person in your life…you care for him…’

‘You're right’ Ken said to his knees. ‘I do.’

Ken rose. ‘Thank you’ he said. ‘I should go now.’

‘But you still have time left’ the therapist told him.

‘It’s ok’ Ken said, moving towards the door. ‘I'm…meeting him again.’

‘Mustang?’

‘Yeah.’

‘You’ve been seeing him for several weeks now haven’t you?’

Ken paused at the door.

‘Yeah’ he said again.

‘Your family don’t approve of him do they?’

‘No’ Ken said. ‘They don’t.’

‘Why?’

‘Because….’ Ken narrowed his eyes. ‘He turned to the therapist again. ‘You’ve really helped me out these past few months. I just hope I don’t have to come back.’
He smiled. ‘Bye Ken’ he said. ‘Take care.’
Ken nodded, and left.

A short while later and Ken was sitting opposite Mustang in a café, watching silently as Mustang slurped his milkshake loudly.
‘Can you stop doing that?’ Ken asked. ‘It’s annoying.’
Mustang paused, glancing up at him.
‘Sorry’ he mumbled, putting the drink down. ‘I didn’t mean to annoy……why are you looking at me like that?’
‘I'm trying to figure you out’ Ken mused aloud, weaving his fingers together and mumbling into his hands as he leant forwards on the table. ‘I don’t even know where you begin with you.’
‘What's to figure out?’ Mustang said loudly, throwing his hands in the air. ‘I'm just a normal guy. You are the one I find interesting here. *I* am trying to figure *you* out.’
‘What's to figure out about me?’ Ken asked.
‘Well…I was wondering, why would a person like you, who is so against everything that I am, want to spent time with me? It’s almost like you're comparing our lives…as if there is something wrong with your own…’
Ken stared at him, wearing a shocked expression now.
‘I was wondering’ Ken spoke aloud, ‘how can someone be so carefree?’
‘I've already answered this question’ Mustang replied, stirring his milkshake. ‘You only live once…best to make the most of it.’
‘No’ Ken shook his head. ‘I don’t think that explains it. It’s something else…it feels more like you….don’t care about your own life…’
Mustang began to slurp on his drink, giving Ken a blank expression.
‘I know your life is your own’ Ken went on, ‘but I can’t help thinking…what would your parents think if you had died that day?’
‘I-’
‘What would your parents have said’ Ken interrupted him loudly, ‘if you had died?’
Mustang pursed his lips, giving a sigh, his shoulders slumped.
‘They would be devastated.’
Ken leant back in his chair, sighing and shaking his head.

‘Maybe I should stop trying to figure you out…its seeming to be an impossible task…maybe there is no answer.’

‘That’s more like it’ Mustang gleamed. ‘Stop trying to figure *me* out and figure *yourself* out.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘You're confused’ Mustang said to him. ‘I feel like you are showing more interest in me than you should…not that I mind…I quite like you….but I think it has to do with something more than just me saving your life.’

Ken frowned. ‘Maybe you're right’ he said. ‘Maybe I should stop comparing our lives…and stop trying to understand you…’ he lifted his coffee and took a sip, finishing it off.

‘Are you done?’ Mustang asked, indicating the cup.

‘Yeah.’

‘Hold up’ Mustang said hastily, slurping loudly on his milkshake again, before putting it down and rising. ‘Ok. I'm done’ he said happily. ‘Should we go?’

‘Sure’ Ken said, pushing back his chair and standing.

They left the café, walking across the street they made to cross the road.

Ken grabbed Mustang by the arm suddenly, jerking him back.

The car that nearly hit him whizzed by. Ken let go of Mustang’s arm.

‘What are you doing?’ he hissed. ‘You can’t just walk out into the road!’

‘Ken’ Mustang smirked smugly at him, completely unfazed by what had just happened. ‘What's it going to do? Hit me?’

Mustang turned away, tutting and muttering under his breath as he moved away, walking into the road again.

Ken’s heart jumped in his chest then, feeling suddenly nervous for Mustang.

‘Hey Ken!’

He turned towards the source of the noise, seeing Alyssa skipping up to him.

‘There you are’ she sighed. ‘I haven’t seen you in ages. Why haven’t you called me? Why haven’t we met up?’

‘I'm sorry’ Ken said to her as she stopped before him. ‘I was busy today’ he said turning to Mustang, who stood now in the middle of the road, waving back at him and ignoring the cars that drove by either side of him in opposite directions.

‘You blew me off today to be with *him*?’ Alyssa said with disgust.

‘He saved my life’ Ken told her flatly.

‘Why are you so interested in him? You're always together.’

‘That’s not true.’

‘We were supposed to go out together today’ she whined. ‘Why did you choose to be with him?’

‘Because he was available’ Ken replied. ‘You couldn’t come out today remember?’

‘But…why are you with *him?*’

Ken narrowed his eyes.

‘Do you have a problem with Mustang?’ Ken asked, voice growing quiet in his anger.

‘You know what he is’ Alyssa snapped. ‘I don’t want you hanging out with him anymore.’

Ken balled his fists, drawing a deep breath.

Mustang placed a hand upon his shoulder before he had the chance to say something he might regret. He had quickly returned to Ken’s side.

‘Is there a problem miss?’ Mustang spoke politely to Alyssa.

She glowered at him.

‘I don’t know what you’ve done to Ken’ she hissed at him, ‘but he hasn’t been the same since he first met you.’

‘Of that I do not doubt’ Mustang spoke smugly.

He then put his arm around Ken’s shoulders, pulling him close and kissing his cheek.

Ken’s heart skipped a beat, his eyes wide with shock as he blinked several times. Alyssa before him was livid with pure rage. She knew Mustang was teasing her, dangling her own boyfriend in front of her like he owned him already.

‘You…’ she said through gritted teeth. ‘You have no right to be around Ken.’

‘Ken can tell me to leave if he wants’ Mustang told her.

‘It’s wrong what you're doing’ Alyssa hissed.

‘Why?’ Mustang asked her.

‘Because my parents tell me.’

Mustang’s eyebrow twitched in annoyance then.

‘I believe…’ he spoke slowly, ‘that you should live your life as you should, not how others want. I believe…that you should live in the moment.’

‘My parents tell me how to behave’ Alyssa told him angrily. ‘I follow their rules…they teach me right from wrong.’

‘Sheep’ Mustang answered simply. ‘Do you always blindly obey what other people tell you?’

‘They are my parents.’

‘And you are a fool.’

Ken’s stomach twinged in nervousness then as he saw Alyssa’s cheeks flush even more, his palms beginning to sweat. Alyssa glared harder than Ken ever thought possible.

For a moment he thought that she might try to drag him away, might try to argue further.
But she just turned on her heel and stormed off without another word.
Ken let out a heavy sigh, finally relaxing slightly.
That was scary… he thought.
Mustang grabbed him by the shoulders roughly then, turning Ken around to face him.
Ken tilted his head back as Mustang kissed him, holding him tightly.
He stared back in shock as Mustang leant away from him again, smiling.
'I'm sorry' Mustang whispered, letting go of him. 'I couldn't resist….I just…'
Ken's stomach fluttered then, as Mustang reached forward to touch his face, but drew back suddenly.
'You know' Mustang said to him as Ken stared at him in shock, 'there was a time you would have protested at such a thing.'
'I….' Ken spluttered, '….I…'
'You've changed' Mustang said. He cocked his head at Ken, considering him. 'I like you' he said. 'I think you're cute.'
Ken's cheeks began to flush.
'Hey!' Mustang suddenly called, waving to a figure over Ken's shoulder.
Ken glanced around, seeing another male figure waving back.
'I should go' Mustang told him hastily. 'I want to see you again. Is that ok for you?'
'Y-yes' Ken stammered, his mind a blur. 'I mean….'
'I'll see you around' Mustang smirked at him, pausing.
Ken thought for a moment that he would kiss him again, but Mustang turned away, jogging away from him and towards the other figure.
Ken turned and watched them, seeing Mustang and the other male figure wrap themselves in each other's arms, kissing passionately, before letting go of each other and walking hand in hand.
Ken faced the other way again, hand going to his mouth as he thought.
He let his hand drop to his side, moving forwards along the street, heading home.
When he got there, his mother was furious.
'What have you been saying to Alyssa?'
Ken stared at her in shock for a moment, before finding his voice.
'What? Nothing! Why….?'
'She says she saw another man kiss you!' his mother hissed through gritted teeth.
She was furious.

Oh gods… Ken's heart skipped a beat in his chest. *She said that…..?! I'm in trouble……*

'You had better explain yourself' she snarled, grabbing him by the shoulders and shaking him. 'You're supposed to marry Alyssa! Why are you wasting time keeping the company of this……*disgrace*?'

'Its…it's not like that….' Ken fumbled. 'It was nothing really.'

'He *kissed* you!'

'A peck on the cheek' Ken said flustered.

His mother's eyes flashed.

Ken's heart suddenly felt as if it had turned to stone.

'You know the type of person he is' she spoke in a dangerous whisper. 'I don't want you seeing him anymore.'

A flicker of anger coursed through him.

Live your life as you should, not how others want. Live in the moment.

Ken shoved his mother away harshly then, something he had never done before.

He could see how shocked she was for it.

'You should be grateful to him' he said to her in a raised voice. 'I would be *dead* if it wasn't for him. He is a good person. He saved my life, and I won't let you control me anymore. This is my life!'

'Ken wait!'

But he ignored her, running to the front door.

He paused then, glaring back at her as he lingered in the open doorway.

'Whatever you think of him' Ken snapped back at his mother, 'you're wrong. Mustang is a good person.'

And with that he slammed the door, disappearing back into the streets again.

That evening

'You're here' Mustang cried happily, opening the door and seeing him there. Dean grinned slyly at him.

'Who's that baby?' Simon purred coming up behind Mustang and draping his arm across his shoulders. 'Oh, he's here. Come on in.'

Mustang closed the door behind Dean as he entered the apartment. Mustang didn't even have time to turn when Simon pushed into him, pinning him against the door.

‘Simon’ Mustang giggled. ‘We haven’t even started yet.’

‘Well why wait?’ Simon said nibbling on Mustang’s earlobe.

Mustang bowed his head grinning, shoulders hunched and cheek pressed to the door.

He turned then, grabbing Simon roughly and pulling him close, kissing him forcefully and yanking his head back, grasping onto his hair tightly. Simon flinched as Mustang bowed his head, biting into Simon’s flesh, sinking his teeth into his chest.

‘Hey!’ Dean called out to them both, lingering in the doorway of the master bedroom. ‘Are you coming or what?’

Mustang cried out excitedly, holding onto Simon’s wrist and pulling him towards the bedroom, letting go of Simon just as he reached the door and throwing himself into Dean.

He pushed Dean onto the bed, grasping his face and opening his mouth wide as he kissed him, licking him, biting his lip.

‘Ah’ Dean moaned, ‘easy…I don’t want you to break me.’

Mustang leaned back as Dean licked his bleeding lip, a sly grin crossed Mustang’s face as he felt Simon’s hands snake around his waist from behind, slipping beneath his trousers and caressing him.

Mustang bowed his head, leaning forwards on his elbows as Simon worked. Dean lifted Mustang’s chin, kissing him again, as Mustang licked the blood from his lips.

Their clothes were thrown about all across the room, and the lights were turned off.

One of them tightened the collar around Mustang’s neck, pulling back hard on the chain and making him groan. Mustang tensed, opening his mouth as saliva ran from the corner of his mouth and down his chin.

Dean was kneeling before him as Mustang rested on all fours upon the bed. Dean grabbed Mustang roughly by the hair then, which was let down and falling about his shoulders. He jerked his head up, making Mustang look him in the eye.

‘Take it you dirty little whore.’

Mustang opened his mouth as Dean stroked the end of his member across his face. Dean pulled back, before leaning forward again, this time going right down Mustang’s throat.

‘Don’t choke’ Dean warned, as Mustang coughed once, ‘and don’t bite down either.’

Mustang glanced up at him, pressing his teeth lightly down and smiling.

Dean grasping Mustang’s head with both hands now as he began to fuck his mouth, working to his own rhythm, first slow, then fast, then slow.

Mustang flinched then as he felt fingers slip into him from behind. Tears shimmered in his eyes as he looked back at Simon behind him, one hand snaking around Mustang’s waist to his

front, fingers wrapped around him as he jerked his hand sharply back and forth. With his other hand, he moved behind Mustang, two fingers pointing, going in and out fast before taking his hand back, and pushing himself in forcefully.

Mustang moaned in pain as Simon fucked him hard from behind, hand still working on his front as he leant over him to get a better grasp. Before him Dean's thrusts began to quicken, and he pulled out just as he finished, coming all over Mustang's face and around his eye.

Mustang gritted his teeth, balling the sheets up in his fists as he ejaculated. Behind him Simon paused, releasing him and pulling his sticky fingers away. He brought his hand to his mouth, running his tongue along his palm and fingers once, before reaching for the base of Mustang's neck, and clawing him as hard as he could, running his nails all the way down Mustang's back.

'Aaahh!'

Simon grasped Mustang then by the hips, digging his nails into him as he took his pleasure, pumping harder and faster until he came, before pulling out quickly and shoving Mustang forwards on the bed.

They rested for only a short time.

And then it was Simon's turn.

Mustang moved over across the bed, crawling on top of Simon and running his tongue down his body to between his legs as Dean sat on his chest. Dean fucked his mouth while Mustang sucked him off, one arm wrapped around the top of Simon's leg, and with his other hand he slipped his fingers in and out of Simon.

Then before they had finished, they changed positions.

Mustang pushed Dean onto his back on the bed, lifting his legs up and pushing into him, Mustang began to sweat and groan as Dean beneath him, clawed at his back, biting and sucking as Mustang's flesh, as Simon at the same time, fucked Mustang from behind.

Mustang went to shower after that, cheeks flushed and body trembling with exhaustion as he leant forward with his hand against the wall.

Specks of blood ran from the lines down his back, and there were small bruises and bite marks all over his chest and shoulders.

'Hey are you nearly done in there?' Dean called to him from behind, standing in the open doorway of the bathroom with a hand on his hip, completely naked.

Mustang turned back to him with a faint smile.

'Come join me' he gasped, 'there's not much room so we'll have to get real close to all fit.'

Simon joined in too, and the three of them all washed together, one occasion teasing the other as they all jostled for the water, grabbing lightly parts of each other, licking each other, sharing the occasional kiss.

Eventually they all dried themselves and found their clothes which were scattered throughout the master bedroom, getting dressed and all collapsing on the sofa, where they fell asleep watching a film, all utterly exhausted.

But Mustang rested only for a short time, before going out again.

Stupid Ken cursed himself as he walked down the streets alone. *I never realised how controlling she was…not until now.* He stopped walking then, glaring at the floor beneath him. *Mustang…* he thought. *Mustang was the one who made me realise….do I really want the life my parents have planned for me?*

He shook his head then, trying to clear his thoughts.

'Mustang…I have to talk to Mustang…he will help me…….maybe…'

Ken patted himself down, finding his mobile and pulling it from his pocket. He paused then, suddenly realising something with regret.

I don't have his number…

Ken sighed wearily, pushing the phone back into his pocket.

Think……where could he be?

He wandered through the town for a while, heading to the only place he thought he might find him.

The gay club…Ken thought nervously, standing before it. *Do I dare go in…?*

He stepped to the side as a group of young men entered the club.

'Hey stud' one of the men winked. 'What's a handsome young man like you doing hanging around outside and all by yourself? It's much more fun inside.'

'I…' Ken fumbled. 'I'm waiting for someone…he…might be in the club.'

'Well if he's in the club' another of the men said leaning forward, 'you're not going to find him out here are you.'

Ken's cheeks flushed at that.

'Why do you go inside?'

'I'm not gay' Ken stammered.

'Oh…' one of the men said flatly. 'That's a shame.'

They moved on.
Ken let out the breath he had been holding, touching a hand to his temple and turning away.
I can't go in. I can't go in. I can't go in…

A minute or so later, he went in.
'Mustang isn't here yet' the barman told him. 'He'll be in shortly though…I know that for sure. If you just wait a few moments….'
'How do you know he'll be here?' Ken asked him, trying to avoid the glances of several men nearby.
'He's performing on stage' the barman said.
'He's…' Ken began, '…performing…?'
A short while later, Ken saw Mustang suddenly appear on the stage at the back of the club. He was surprised, having not even seen him enter from the front.
There must be another door out back Ken thought absently to himself.
As Mustang began to perform, Ken couldn't believe what he was seeing.
Mustang danced upon the stage alongside several other men positioned in a half-circle around him, dancing in perfect formation with the others to the beat of the music.
Ken's heart fluttered.
He looked so handsome on the stage as the lead dancer, flicking his long red-red hair back and swaying his hips.
And then he began to sing.
Ken was surprised for the second time, to hear such a beautiful voice.
It was perfect.
Ken was surprised for the third time, when Mustang began to strip, opening his shirt to the cheer of the crowd, as he danced in unison with the others behind him, and singing loudly as he did into his microphone.
Ken turned sharply away, glaring the other direction.
I shouldn't be seeing this!
It was at that moment when Ken realised he had unwittingly caught the attention of another man.
'Hey you' the man said playfully to him. He wore tight clothes, a high collar and had a long blonde fringe that covered half his face. 'What's a pretty boy like you doing alone here?'
'I'm waiting for someone' Ken answered shortly, staring at the bar.

‘Well…’ the stranger said moving closer still. ‘Would you like to be kept busy while you wait?’

‘N-no’ Ken fumbled. He glanced away then towards the stage then back at the man before him.

The stranger noticed this.

‘You like what you see?’ he asked, eyes flickering towards Mustang.

The performance ended then, and the men in the club began to cheer.

It was then that Mustang noticed Ken standing at the bar, he faltered, clearly surprised to see Ken there, he leapt off the stage, making his way over.

‘Here he comes’ the stranger gleamed, watching Mustang drawing closer through the crowd.

‘Hey!’ Mustang called out.

Ken saw as Mustang stopped before him, his shirt still open and sweat upon his chest. Ken’s cheeks flushed at that, and he looked sharply away.

‘This one belongs to me’ Mustang told the stranger. ‘He’s mine.’

‘I’ll leave you to it then’ the stranger said with a smirk. ‘I should have known such a pretty young boy would already be taken.’

He drifted off, leaving Ken shocked and glaring after him, hot and suddenly bright red.

‘C…can we leave?’ Ken stammered not looking at Mustang. ‘I need some fresh air.’

Chapter Seven

‘Why did you come here?’ Mustang asked him when they had left the club and were out in the street again, walking slowly away and to quieter parts.

‘I wanted to see you’ Ken mumbled uncertainly to his feet. ‘I…thought you might be here.’

‘Well’ Mustang laughed. ‘I’ll try not to be so predictable again.’

‘It was just a guess’ Ken said hastily. ‘You're not predictable.’

Mustang gave him a strange look, eyebrow raised sceptically. ‘Why *did* you want to see me anyway?’

Ken turned his head away from him.

‘I’ve just got…’ he began uncertainly, ‘worries on my mind…that’s all…’

Mustang stared at him for a moment.

‘I…realised we’ve been meeting up for ages….but I don’t have your number.’
‘You want my number?’ Mustang grinned suddenly amused. ‘I thought you’d never ask!’ he leant towards him then, leaning on his shoulder. ‘You're not falling in love with me are you?’
‘No way!’ Ken snapped loudly back.
‘I think doth protest too much’ Mustang replied quickly.
‘Shut up’ Ken hissed, glaring at him.
‘Alright alright’ Mustang said, waving him away and stepping back to give him space. ‘I'm just teasing.’
They continued to walk.
‘I’ll give you my number’ Mustang said.
‘Fine’ Ken said grudgingly, pulling out his mobile.
Mustang told him his number, and Ken typed it in, saving it in the contacts.
‘So why are you out so late anyway?’ Mustang asked him when Ken had replaced his phone back in his pocket. ‘I thought your family wouldn’t like it. They're so protective of you anyway.’
‘I don’t know’ Ken mumbled staring at the ground as they walked. ‘The truth is I'm starting to have doubts about them. They don’t know what's best for me.’ He faltered then, remembering himself, suddenly shocked at what he had heard himself say. ‘I shouldn’t have said that’ Ken said, alarmed.
Mustang paused for a moment, considering.
‘Do you want to come back to my place and have a drink? We could talk properly and get out of this cold. Or do you want to go home?’
No I can’t go home! Not yet!
‘I’ll go to your place’ Ken murmured. ‘But…only if you don’t tell anyone I was there.’
‘I wouldn’t dream of it’ Mustang smirked.
Ken raised his head, glowering at him.
‘Come on’ Mustang sang, placing his arm around Ken’s shoulders and walking with him.
Seconds later as they made their way along, Mustang still had his arm around Ken, leaning into him uncomfortably. Ken shoved him away indignantly, demanding he be given space.
Mustang only laughed, apologising sheepishly.

Mustang’s apartment was on the other side of town; they were able to keep warm by walking briskly, as the cold began to set in. They reached the apartment complex which was situated

in a peaceful area and was usually relatively quiet. It was only a small building, but looked cosy.

'It's nice' Ken said glancing up at it.

Mustang watched him, staring at him hard as if trying to read him, trying to decide if Ken was making fun of him, and immediately looking away when Ken turned to face him.

'It's this way' Mustang pointed.

They climbed the stairs to the second floor. Mustang pulled out a key as they reached one of the doors, and Ken waited patiently for him to unlock it.

They stepped into the apartment, Mustang held the door for Ken as he entered, closing it after him.

It was dark inside. All the lights were off.

'Are your family not here?' Ken asked him.

'Um' Mustang began uncertainly. 'No.'

He flipped on the lights to the kitchen and went over to the fridge to get some drinks, indicating for Ken to sit at the table. Ken did so, feeling slightly nervous.

I didn't realise I would be here alone he thought. *I assumed his family…*

'So when will your family be back?' Ken asked him. It was dark in the rest of the apartment.

'They won't be back tonight' Mustang said, avoiding his gaze. 'We won't be bothered.' He hesitated then, reading Ken's worried expression. 'Don't worry' Mustang said sulkily, returning to the table and placing a canned drink before each of them. 'I'm not going to do anything to you. Not unless you want me to.'

Ken took his drink nervously, realising from his tone that Mustang was serious.

'So' he said avoiding the subject. 'Where did your family go……Mustang?'

Mustang wasn't looking at him, the can was half-way to his lips and his eyes were distant as he stared at the floor.

'What's wrong?'

'I'm sorry' Mustang said. 'The truth is…I live here alone……my family live somewhere else.'

'You live here alone?'

'Yeah.' Mustang began to drink deeply.

'But…why?' Ken asked, feeling a pang of sadness within him.

Mustang turned to him at last, meeting his gaze, and Ken saw something strange in his eyes. For the briefest moment, it looked like fear.

Mustang smiled suddenly.

‘Can we not talk about it?’ Mustang asked politely. ‘Please?’
‘Sure’ Ken said bowing his head and bringing the can to his lips. ‘…Sorry’ he mumbled.

Ken had a few drinks, and a short while later, he leant forward on the table, head in his hands, trying to fight back tears.
‘I wish I’d never met you!’ Ken snapped at Mustang, though speaking to the table, slurring his words as he did so. ‘You’ve thrown my life into discord! The first time you met me and you kissed me……saving my life and causing me to suffer…*horrible* flashbacks and night-terrors……and just when I've almost recovered…and don’t get the nightmares again…*you* show up….and then I see….I see…’ his body began to tremble, he covered his face as tears began to roll down his cheeks. ‘My family don’t think of me the same anymore! Because of you…what have you done to me?! Why am I feeling these things towards you….*why*?’
Mustang listened in silent shock, one elbow rested upon the table, eyes wide and jaw clenched.
‘I've always been happy….’ Ken said, voice shaking. ‘Until I met you my life was perfect…I've never doubted my family before…until I met you….and I hate you for it……I hate you.’
‘You’ve had too much to drink’ Mustang said sternly, rising and moving around the table to him.
‘Don’t touch me!’ Ken snapped, baring his teeth at Mustang as he moved closer. ‘Do you have any idea how much I wish to *be* you? You live such a carefree life…nothing holds you back…you don’t even live with your parents…do you know how controlling *my* parents are? I thought I was happy with them…until I met you…’ he continued to cry. ‘Why…why are you doing this to me? Why did I have to ever meet you?’
‘Is that how you really feel?’ Mustang spoke seriously, standing over him. ‘That you want to *be* me?’
‘Yes…’ Ken whispered into his hands, ‘yes.’
‘Trust me’ Mustang said angrily. ‘You don’t want my life.’
‘But I do…I never realised how trapped I felt until I met you.’
‘Maybe it’s a good thing that you did then’ Mustang said.
Ken raised his head, eyes red and teary.
Mustang took both his wrists, holding firmly as he leant forwards. He kissed him, Ken felt Mustang’s lips upon his.
It took him several seconds to register.

‘No’ he said, pushing him away, and then he stumbled from his chair, falling to the floor.
Mustang went to grab him again, but Ken pushed him away.
‘Don’t touch me’ he whispered to him. ‘Don’t…’
‘You're not used to drinking are you’ Mustang said, though it was not a question.
Mustang ignored Ken’s feeble protests as he knelt before him, lifting him in his arms and carrying him through the apartment.
He took him to a spare room, laying him down on the bed, where Ken then became still, breathing slowly and deeply, cheeks flushed.
‘I think you should stay here’ Mustang told him, sitting on the edge of the bed and watching him with a frown upon his face. ‘You can’t go home like this.’
Ken barely seemed to hear him, he only groaned, shifting on the bed before becoming still again.
Mustang watched him silently. His gaze travelled down Ken’s body, to his chest and lower as he lay on the bed, and certain thought began to cross his mind as he stared.
Mustang clenched his jaw, turning his head sharply away then before rising and storming from the room. He closed the door and went to his own bed, leaving Ken alone.
The apartment became silent again.

The next morning, Ken woke with the rising sun.
He groaned as he sat up in the unfamiliar bed, gazing about him and blinking in confusion.
He didn’t know where he was at first, and it took several seconds for the memories of the night before to slowly come back to him.
A frown slowly crossed his expression, a frown which turned to a look of alarm.
I've been out all night! He realised, leaping from the bed and stumbling suddenly, body hunched over as he felt suddenly dizzy. *What are my parents going to think?* He worried, straightening up again and marching to the door. *How could I do this to them? They must be so worried…*
He felt terrible, sick and dizzy and mouth dry and stale tasting. He wandered through the apartment, looking for the front door. When he found it, he hesitated, calling out for Mustang. When there was no answer, he simply left, worrying for his family, he headed home as fast as he could.

‘Where were you?! I cannot believe you did this to us! We had to call the police!’

‘I'm sorry’ Ken stammered as his mother bared her teeth at him, positively livid with rage. ‘It was an accident…I didn’t mean to stay out all night.’

‘Have you been drinking?’ his mother asked, sniffing the air around him. ‘You smell like a bar.’

‘Yes.’ Ken answered shortly. He may as well come clean now. It’s not as if he could hide it.

‘You’ve never done such a thing before’ his mother shouted at him. ‘How could you?!’

‘I…I don’t know’ Ken mumbled staring at the floor.

‘It’s most unlike you’ his father spoke quietly stepping forwards. ‘Why are you acting this way lately?’

It was his father’s gentle voice that hurt him most of all, and his throat suddenly tightened.

‘I'm sorry’ Ken whispered, fighting back tears. ‘I…I don’t know….’

‘It’s that boy isn’t it’ his brother said. ‘The one called Mustang was it?’

‘Him again?’ his mother snapped, her anger reignited. ‘I don’t want you seeing him again. He’s a bad influence. Don’t you see what he’s doing to you?’

Ken raised his head to his mother, eyes shimmering.

‘You have a good life’ his mother spoke softly now, placing her hands upon his shoulders. ‘Why are you trying to destroy it?’

‘I'm not…’ Ken sobbed. ‘I mean…I didn’t…’

His mother embraced him then, holding him tight.

‘I'm just glad you're alright’ his mother sighed. ‘I was so scared…never do that to us again.’

‘I promise’ Ken mumbled, ‘and I'm sorry…’

His sister padded across the room towards him, hugging him tightly and burying her face in his chest.

‘Please don’t do that again brother’ she said to him. ‘We were so worried.’

‘I won’t’ he said to her. ‘I won’t...’

Later that day, Ken sat alone on the edge of the town where the trees grew tall and the grass was green. A shallow river ran past his feet. Ken now sat on the bank, head buried in his arms as he hugged his knees to his chest.

He lifted his head, staring at the water as he remembered the previous night a little clearer now.

It had at first all been a blur to him, but now he was slowly remembering.

He kissed me Ken realised, hand going to his mouth. *He kissed me……again…*

His expression turned into a glower.

‘Mustang…’

Weeks passed, and nothing out of the ordinary had happened since Ken stayed out all night. His life was back to normal, like it was before he knew Mustang, almost.

‘Why are you ignoring me?’ Mustang glowered at him sullenly.

Ken gritted his teeth, glaring back.

‘I'm busy’ Ken shot back.

‘You’ve been ignoring my texts’ Mustang told him.

‘I told you I've been busy.’

Mustang shrugged. ‘It doesn’t take long to send a text’ Mustang said showing his hands. ‘You don’t want to talk to me anymore do you.’

It wasn’t phrased as a question.

Ken turned his back on him.

‘I've just…’ Ken said through gritted teeth, ‘got a lot going on in my life right now.’

‘I don’t want to cause you any problem’ Mustang said.

‘It’s too late for that.’

Mustang narrowed his eyes. ‘This isn’t because I kissed you is it?’

Ken tensed suddenly.

‘That’s it isn’t it?’

‘Look just leave me alone’ Ken said storming away.

Mustang called after him, but Ken ignored him, striding quickly as fast as he could in the opposite direction, pulling out his mobile as he went.

Ken scrolled down the list of names in the phone book, coming to Mustang’s name and number.

He deleted the contact, sighing with satisfaction as he returned the mobile to his pocket.

He suddenly felt lighter for it.

Chapter Eight

‘I can’t wait until we move in together’ Alyssa was saying, skipping ahead of him happily and swinging her arms merrily. ‘I have everything planned out, I know where I want to live, what I want the place to look like…as soon as we’ve finished college…’ she sighed, turning back to face him with a wide smile upon her face. ‘A soon as we finish college,’ she said to him, ‘we can be married and start a family.’

Ken slowed to a stop, giving her a level expression.

‘Is that what you really want?’ he asked her.

‘What do you mean?’ she asked him, her smile faltering slightly.

‘I mean…’ Ken began uncertainly, ‘do you mind having your future planned out for you like this? You know we are only together in the first place because of our parents…’

Alyssa stopped then, moving closer to him.

‘Meeting you is the best thing that’s ever happened to me’ she spoke genuinely. ‘Do you not feel the same?’

‘I do but…’ Ken hesitated, ‘I just want to know that this is what you really want. I don’t want to think that you're here with me just because your parents want you to be.’

Alyssa reached out to him, taking both his hands in hers.

‘I love you Ken, I love you more than anything…I don’t ever want to be parted from you.’

Ken stared at her, his expression sombre.

Alyssa lifted her head to his, kissing him gently.

Ken’s attention drifted out of focus, and he closed his eyes, closing his fingers as Alyssa held him.

As he kissed her back, Mustang’s words rang through his mind.

Live your life how you want, not how others want you to live.

‘Come on’ Ken said to Alyssa, speaking more confidently now, taking her hand in his. ‘Let’s go to the park.’

Time passed, and Ken had not seen Mustang in many weeks.

Things began to slowly slide back to the way they were before, and Ken found himself feeling happy, feeling liberated.

Things are great he thought to himself as he leant back, smiling to the sky. *I haven’t argued with my family or Alyssa in ages, not since I was hanging around with Mustang…*

The cool breeze lifted his hair, and the warm sun shone its rays gently on his face.

Things are great. They are just the way they were before……so why do I still feel so different?

'Ken!'

He looked around at the sound of his mother's voice, seeing his mother and the rest of his family sitting upon the picnic blanket.

He rose and went over to them.

'Come along dear' his mother said to him. 'If you don't hurry up the food will be gone.'

'Alright' Ken laughed, sitting between his mother and his sister, who was busy stuffing crisps into her mouth as fast as possible.

'Sue, don't do that' their mother scolded, 'you'll choke.'

'She's right' Ken told her as Sue took a big gulp of water from one of the small bottles they had brought with them, 'you shouldn't do that, it's not lady like' Ken said taking a napkin and dabbing her mouth dry as she began to dribble.

Sue began to squirm, flinching and trying to get away from him.

'Why do I care about being lady like?' Sue protested.

'How will you find a good boyfriend if you don't act like a lady?' their mother said to her.

'I don't want a boyfriend' Sue said wrinkling hew nose, 'ew.'

Ken only smiled at her as their father shook his head.

'So how's Alyssa then anyway' Ken's brother Walter asked him. 'Wasn't she supposed to come out with us today?'

'Yeah she's fine' Ken answered with a nod. 'She'll be here a bit later, she's visiting her grandparents now, her parents are dropping her off later.'

The happy family stayed here in this park for a long time, talking happily as they ate the food they had packed and brought with them, food that at first had been overflowing from the bag they carried it in. After that they played games, ball games, games involving hoops, they played hide and seek, and when the wind began to pick up, they brought out the kite they had packed away.

Ken was just watching his mother and sister playing with the kite, sitting by the picnic basket as beside him his father and brother played a game of cards.

Suddenly in the distance he saw a figure approaching with corn coloured hair.

His heart leapt in his chest as he recognised Alyssa, and a smile broke across his face.

He rose to his feet running to her.

She grinned happily at him as she watched him approach, throwing her arms open to greet him. He embraced her tightly once before lifting his in his arms and hugging her again.

‘Ken!’ Alyssa giggled, holding onto him as he lifted her. ‘Put me down! Ah! Stop!’ she squealed. ‘That tickles!’

He stayed his hands, gently lowering her and putting her back on the ground.

‘I'm so glad you're finally here’ he breathed. ‘I was missing you so much.’

‘I know…I'm sorry’ she hastened. ‘I came here as soon as I could.’

‘It’s alright’ he sighed, ‘…you're here now.’

They stayed in the park for hours, Alyssa joining in the games the family played. Then as the sun began to set, she and Ken went off alone together, to sit upon the hill and watch the view before them as the gentle orange glow swept across the park and the town that surrounded.

‘It’s so beautiful here’ Alyssa sighed. ‘I don’t think I ever want to leave this town.’

Ken smiled, turning away from the sunset. He didn’t speak, but he leaned closer to Alyssa then, kissing her deeply.

He broke away from her, putting his arm around her and holding her close, as they sat upon the bench gazing at the world around them.

‘So what are you going to do’ Ken asked her quietly, ‘when we finish college?’

‘I want to be a teacher’ Alyssa said, ‘it’s what I've always wanted to do. I just respect them so much….’ She paused, a faraway look in her eyes. ‘I want to be like that someday…’

‘I'm sure you will’ Ken gleamed, taking her hand in his and with his other hand trailing his finger along the back of her hand.

‘What about you?’ she asked. ‘What do you want to do?’

‘I don’t really know’ Ken admitted. ‘I want to get a job…and earn as much money as I can…so that we can buy a place together and get married.’

The edges of Alyssa’s eyes crinkled joyfully as she listened.

‘I want that’ she breathed. ‘I want that more than anything.’

‘I know’ Ken nodded.

‘Do you…’ Alyssa began, ‘do you think we could stay in this town?’ she asked. ‘I want to stay close to my family.’

‘Of course we can’ Ken said to her. ‘I don’t want to leave my family either.’

‘And um…’ Alyssa began shyly, never having spoken about this before, ‘do you think that…one day we might have children?’

Ken hesitated, caught a little off guard by the question.

‘Yeah’ he said at last. ‘I’d like that.’

The next day, Ken went to school. Even here he had managed to avoid Mustang, going so far as to change classes, which had been a big hassle, but in the end had been worth it.

As he sat in his seat, he glanced about him contentedly.

No Mustang he thought happily. *Again.* He smiled. *Good.*

The class continued as normal. But something was different that day, though Ken was not the first person to notice it.

One of the other students closest to the window turned from the teacher, who stood with her back to the room as she wrote on the board. Seconds later, a second student turned to stare out of the window, then a third.

Ken completely oblivious continued to write in his book, copying some notes.

At first he heard something tapping the window, which he ignored, and then he heard shouting.

Ken's heart sunk in his chest as he recognised the muffled voice.

'Ken! Keeeeeeeen! Ken! Ken! Ken! Hey Ken! Keeeeeeen! Keeeeeen! KEEEEEEEEEEEN!

Ken's eyebrow twitched irritant, and he turned in his seat, glaring at Mustang who hung outside the window waving at him.

'Hey Ken!' he called to him. 'Hey Ken! HEEEEEYYY!'

Ken began to feel suddenly very uncomfortable as he realised he was the centre of attention. The other students had noticed, and of course the teacher had now too. Outside the window Mustang was being so loud, there was no way anyone would not have noticed him by now.

Ken rose from his seat, stomping over to him and opening the window.

'What do you want?' Ken snapped. 'You're annoying the entire building! This is the first floor you know.'

Mustang hung precariously to the window ledge, with nothing beneath his legs to hold him up.

'I found you!' Mustang gasped, moving his fingers to try to get a better grip of the ledge. 'Good. Listen I need to talk to you.'

'You could have called me' Ken snapped. 'I'm in the middle of class.'

'You blocked me remember? And why did you change class? I know you're avoiding me. Why are you avoiding me?'

Ken glanced behind him into the classroom, where the other students and teacher were watching him. Several of the students were amused. The teacher on the other hand was greatly irritated, standing with her arms folded and glaring at him.

‘I've got class’ Ken said to Mustang again moving back. ‘Go away.’

‘Hey wait!’

Ken closed the window on him, turning back and returning to his seat, trying his best to ignore the stares and sniggers of the other students.

‘Ken!’ came Mustangs muffled voice through the window. ‘Ken! Ken! KEN! KEEEAAAAAHHHHH!’

Ken glanced around, eyes wide now.

Mustang wasn’t there anymore. Ken could only assume he had fallen.

‘Stacy?’ he said awkwardly to the teacher. ‘I'm sorry but…can I please be excused?’

‘Just go’ the teacher sighed wearily. ‘I don’t want another interruption like this again. I have a class to run.’

‘Yes’ Ken bowed apologetically as he rose, quickly gathering his things. ‘Thank you…and sorry…’ he added awkwardly in a mumble.

He hurried from the classroom, ignoring the other students that laughed at him.

Stupid Mustang he cursed him in his mind. *What on earth is he doing? Why is he h*ere? *That jerk…*

When Ken reached the ground floor outside where Mustang had fallen, he found Mustang had interrupted another class, the one directly below his, and was flirting with another boy through the open window.

Ken faltered for a moment, watching as Mustang spoke teasingly to this boy, stroking his chin and moving his body seductively as if shy.

Yeah right Ken glowered at this.

The teacher in this classroom seemed indifferent to this, and ignored them both, continuing the lecture as if nothing was happening.

Ken felt anger rise in him.

He stormed towards Mustang.

‘Hey!’ Mustang beamed, seeing him approaching. ‘It’s you! I was hoping to…’

Ken grabbed his arm roughly, turning and pulling him with him as he stormed away.

‘Call me!’ Mustang waved back at the boy in the window, who waved back at him, blowing him a kiss.

Ken dragged him around the corner, letting go of him the second they were out of sight, chest rising and falling as he breathed heavily with anger.

‘What the hell?!!’

‘What?’ Mustang asked innocently.

‘What do you think you're doing interrupting my class like that? Do you think you could have been a little more subtle?’

‘Subtle is really not my style’ Mustang replied flatly.

‘No shit.’ Ken’s hand immediately went to his mouth at that. Even Mustang looked surprised.

I can’t believe I just swore. I never swear…I don’t swear…I've never sworn before…

Ken lowered his hand, feeling even angrier.

He’s changing me for the worse…I mustn’t let him get to me.

‘What do you want?’ Ken snapped at him.

‘Just to talk to you’ Mustang told him, ignoring his outburst, ‘and to ask why you’ve been avoiding me.’

‘My life is my own’ Ken glared. ‘I don’t *have* to hang around you.’

‘What changed?’ Mustang asked him. ‘You used to like hanging out with me.’

‘You're a curse upon me’ Ken said to him, showing his hands. ‘I've never fought with my family or girlfriend before I met you…never…do you have any idea the problems you’ve cause me?’

‘Problems like what?’ Mustang asked flatly, getting irritated himself.

‘My family know what you are. They don’t like me hanging out with someone….someone….’

‘Someone who’s gay?’

Ken bit his tongue.

And then Mustang said something to Ken that caught him off guard.

‘You make me sick. How can you believe your parents truly love you if they treat you that way?’

Ken’s anger instantly dissipated, and he stared at Mustang in shock and confusion then.

‘What is the *real* reason you’re avoiding me?’ Mustang asked him. ‘Are you in love with me?’

Ken’s heart stopped in his chest at that, so shocked was he at the absurdity of the statement.

‘……What?!’

‘That’s it isn't it? You're jealous of the life I live and you want to be more like me. But it’s more than that…isn't it….?’

Ken could only stare back in silent disbelief, utterly lost for words.

‘Well’ Mustang said, placing his hands upon his hips. ‘If I was going out with you, I would love you for who you are, not who I wanted you to be.’ He smirked then. ‘I wouldn’t try to change your true nature. Not ever.’

He turned and walked away.

Shortly after that, Mustang went missing.

Ken was on his way home from college in the afternoon the next day, when several figures rushed up to him. Ken recognised them as some of the men Mustang hung out with at the club.

'Oh! Ken. I thought that was you' one of the men said. 'Listen, have you seen Mustang? We're really worried about him.'

'No?' Ken said pausing and turning back to them. 'Why? Is something wrong?'

'He's been acting weird lately' another of the men said. 'He's not himself. We're all really worried.'

Ken felt a twinge in his stomach.

Where could he have gone? It's not my fault is it?

'I haven't seen him' Ken said again. 'Sorry.'

'Well…' one of the men said. 'If you see him….just…oh….'

Ken began to feel increasingly more nervous as he saw how worried they were.

'Could you just tell him to call us if you see him?' one of the men said. 'It would really mean a lot to us.'

'Sure' Ken said flatly. 'I will.'

'Thanks a lot.'

They moved off.

Ken stayed where he was, feeling suddenly uneasy.

He forced the worries from his mind, instead turning away and heading home.

But he stopped a short while later, feeling his stomach growing tighter.

What is this? He worried then. *Why do I feel so this way?*

He turned and looked around him.

….Mustang…

He pulled out his mobile, sending a message to his brother, telling his family he will be home late.

He replaced the phone back in his pocket, then began to walk the town in search for him.

Why am I doing this? He thought desperately to himself as he searched the entire town, moving at a hurried pace from one place to another, glancing all about him as he went. He

cursed himself then, throat growing tighter as he became ever more frustrated with himself, and worried for Mustang. It was starting to get dark now.

Where is he?!

And then he heard a noise. It was only faint, and must be coming from a source some distance away.

He froze as he listened, pausing for a moment before running towards it.

Its him! It's his voice!

He found Mustang shortly after.

Ken slowed to a stop, breathing heavily and staring up in shock as Mustang balanced precariously on the roof of one of the shops beside him, shouting and cackling to himself and calling out incoherently. He swayed on the spot, and was clearly not himself. Ken presumed initially that he was drunk.

'Mustang!' he called up to him. 'Mustang!'

Mustang stopped his shouting for a moment, turning and staring down at Ken.

'Heeey! What are you doing there dressed like that?'

'What?'

'Why did you bring the seals with you? You know they're not supposed to be here!'

He's delusional Ken realised. *He must be hallucinating.*

'Mustang!' Ken called again. 'Don't move! I'm coming up to get you! Stay there!'

'Don't let the illuminati find us! They have secrets!'

Ken ran around the back of the building quickly, his mind suddenly fraught with worry for Mustang as he moved dangerously close to the edge.

'The illuminati are everywhere!' Mustang called. 'Everywhere around us wherever we look you will find them!'

'Mustang!' Ken shouted to him, clambered onto the balcony railings, jumping up to catch the rooftop and climbing up. 'Stay where you are!'

This part of the town was the part where there were only shops and no houses nearby. It was deserted at this time save for the two of them. They could both shout all night and bother no one.

It was only Ken and Mustang.

He climbed onto the rooftop, seeing Mustang standing there.

Mustang wheeled around to face him, eyes wide.

Mustang began to back away from Ken, unaware that he was heading closer to the edge.

Ken rose to his feet swiftly, rushing over to Mustang and grabbing his arm just as he was about to tip back. Ken pulled Mustang towards him, Mustang fell into him and Ken held him there, gasping heavily as his heart beat painfully in his chest, breathing a sigh of relief.

'Oh thank god…'

He pulled Mustang back from the edge of the roof and looked into his face. He was shocked to see Mustang's pupils were huge, so large that he initially thought his eyes were black.

'Mustang' Ken spoke firmly. 'What have you done?'

'Nothing…' Mustang whispered, '….nothing…' he raised his head, smiling at Ken then. 'It's good to see you…'

Ken reached into Mustang's pockets, beginning to search him. It wasn't long before he pulled from one of the pockets a small clear plastic bag of blue tablets.

'What is this?' Ken demanded, showing them to him.

Mustang smiled upon seeing them.

'You should try some' he grinned. 'They will make you fly.'

'Come on' Ken said, putting his arm around Mustang and helping him walk. 'I'm taking you home.'

Chapter Nine

It was extremely awkward getting Mustang off the roof, but once they were both on the ground again, they made their way slowly back.

Ken walked supporting him the whole way home. When they at last reached Mustang's apartment, they trudged up the steps towards his door.

It was left unlocked, conveniently enough.

'I hardly bother locking my door most of the time' Mustang grinned smugly. 'I'd only lose the keys anyway.'

'It's not safe to do that' Ken told him sternly.

'What's going to happen?' Mustang laughed.

'Someone could break in and steal from you.'

'It's only stuff.'

'Someone could hurt you…could attack you in your sleep.'

‘Meh.’

Ken shook his head, leading Mustang into his apartment and closing the door.

He led him over to his bedroom, sitting him down on the bed.

He went over to the windows to shut the curtains, before returning to Mustang, sitting on the bed beside him.

‘What is the matter with you?’ Ken asked him desperately. ‘Why are you doing this to yourself?’

Mustang groaned heavily, his head in his hands.

‘I need to fuck something.’

‘What…?’

Mustang raised his head, turning to face Ken then. A strange look crossed his eyes then, one of rage…and lust.

Ken rose from the bed quickly as Mustang made a lunge for him. He backed himself against the wall as Mustang advanced slowly on him, eyes fixed upon Ken like a hunter to its prey.

Ken’s heart tightened in his chest, and he made a dash for the door. But Mustang was too fast. He was at the door before Ken could reach it, slamming it shut and rounding on Ken.

Fear began to rise inside Ken as he slowly backed away, staring wide-eyed at Mustang who took a step towards him.

‘Mustang…’ Ken said, his voice shaking. ‘What are you doing?’

Mustang grabbed him by the arm roughly, throwing him back onto the bed.

He was upon him before Ken had time to act, bearing over him, pinning him down and kissing him.

‘No!’ Ken cried, breaking away from him. ‘Stop!’

Mustang grabbed his wrists as he began to struggle, holding him tightly.

‘Mustang!’

Ken flinched as Mustang bit into his neck, so hard he caused him to bleed. Mustang attacked him viciously.

‘Get off me!’ Ken shouted at him, squeezing his eyes tight shut. His heart constricted in his chest as he felt Mustang touch him between the legs. He grabbed Mustang’s hand as he went to unzip him. ‘Stop Mustang please!’

Ken turned over then on his front, pushing himself to his knees he tried to crawl away, but Mustang grabbed him again, slipping his hand up his shirt. Ken groaned in pain as Mustang clawed his chest.

Mustang grabbed him by the hair, jerking his head back.

Ken flinched, becoming still then in Mustang's grasp.

'Please stop…' Ken whispered shaking. 'Please don't hurt me…'

Ken couldn't see Mustang, but he stopped his assault suddenly, feeling Ken beginning to tremble.

'Please stop' Ken whispered. 'Please…'

He felt Mustang relax slightly, and waited for what we would do next.

Ken sat back, facing away from Mustang.

'Please' Ken whispered, his body trembling violently from the shock. 'Please don't do this…'

Mustang grabbed him suddenly, but not in the same way as he had before. He embraced him now, Ken's eyes wide with shock as he felt Mustang's body wracked with sobs as he held him.

Ken glanced around then.

Mustang looked up at him, eyes wide and shining.

'Please help me!' Mustang said. 'I'm so scared!'

Ken gasped at this, his heart skipping a beat.

Mustang held him tightly, sobbing into his shoulder.

'Mustang?' Ken muttered uncertainly. 'What's wrong?'

'I'm sorry' Mustang whispered, letting go of him and pushing him away, turning from him as he did. 'I'm sorry…' he said again. 'You should go.'

Ken moved away, rising from the bed and adjusting himself.

He stared in shock and disbelief at Mustang as he continued to cry, head in his hands.

He turned slowly, moving to the door and opening it, pausing to glance back at Mustang, who ignored him. He closed the door after him, and made to leave.

Ken was at the front door when he froze, hand reaching out to the handle, hovering over it.

He relaxed suddenly, turning back into the apartment.

Everything was silent, almost eerie.

Ken lingered there for a moment, before heading back towards the bedroom. Feeling so torn…so confused…

I can't leave Mustang like this…even though he… Ken grimaced then. *Mustang…*

He returned to the bedroom, opening the door slowly.

Mustang lay on the bed on his side. He was still now, and Ken watched him with sadness.

I can't leave him like this…I can't…

Ken closed the door after him, padding slowly across the room and to the bed.

‘Mustang?’ he spoke quietly. But Mustang did not respond. He was fast asleep, and so quickly.

Ken sat back down upon the bed, watching him closely as Mustang breathed calmly.

I’ll just stay until morning he thought, lying down on the other side of the bed on his side with his back to Mustang. *Just to make sure he’s alright.*

He lay down to rest.

It took him a while to sleep, and when he at last did, he was woken sometime later.

At first he didn’t know what had woken him. And then he heard strange noises.

Ken rolled over quickly, looking around in alarm.

‘…Mustang?’

Mustang was tossing and turning, groaning and clutching his chest.

Oh god…

Mustang rolled over then towards the edge of the bed and was violently sick.

He’s having a heart attack!

Ken leapt up, fumbling for his mobile in his pocket and dialling the number.

On the bed, Mustang lay on his back now, skin beaded with sweat as his body contorted. He groaned again, throwing his head back, both his hands at his chest now.

‘Please help!’ Ken called down the line. ‘I need an ambulance quick!’

As the voice on the other end was speaking to him Ken whipped around to the bed again. His body went cold as he saw Mustang had become still. Crawling over the bed to him and leaning over him. He touched his body, shaking him and calling out his name. But Mustang was unresponsive. Ken felt for a pulse, then pressed an ear to his chest.

‘Oh god’ Ken whined, voice breaking in panic. ‘His *heart’s* not beating! He’s *dead*!’

The voice on the phone told him to be calm, asked for the address, and told Ken that help was on the way.

‘Is he breathing?’ the woman on the phone asked.

‘N-no’ Ken said shaking, putting his ear over Mustang’s mouth and watching his chest for ten second. ‘Oh please…’

‘Just stay calm’ the voice said, ‘and do what I say. Can you perform CPR?’

‘No.’

‘Ok. Place the heel of your hand on the centre of his chest and interlock your other hand on top, lock your arms and press down on his chest thirty times…’

Ken dropped the phone upon the bed, listening to the woman and pressing down on Mustang's chest. After thirty times he stopped, pinching his nose and breathing into him, repeating the whole procedure over again, stopping only when the ambulance arrived.

Ken stepped back as the paramedics got to work, answering hurriedly any questions they asked him, barely able to stop himself from shaking.
'Is he going to be ok?' he whimpered.
'We don't know yet' the paramedic answered as Mustang was carried away on a stretcher. 'His heart has started again, but he won't be in the clear until we get him to a hospital.'

Ken rode in the ambulance to the hospital, sitting in the passenger side at the front, feeling sick to his stomach and caught in a sudden sense of unreality.
This can't be happening…this can't be happening…this can't be happening…
They reached the hospital, Mustang was taken away, and the next thing Ken knew, was that he was sitting alone in the waiting room.
He glanced up at the clock. It was three in the morning.
Oh god he thought as he stared at it, *this is horrible…*
The minutes ticked by agonizingly slow. Each time Ken glanced at the clock, only a minute or two seemed to have passed.

He sighed heavily, putting his head in his hands.

Chapter Ten

The doctor entered the waiting room sometime later, and Ken instantly jumped to his feet.
'Is he alright?' Ken asked, his voice trembling.
'He is stable' the doctor spoke seriously. 'He overdosed on illegal drugs; his heart was beating too fast, and in the end failed. We almost lost him.'
Ken's hand went to his mouth.
He lowered his hand slowly.
'Is he alright now?' he asked. 'Can I go see him?'

‘Yes’ the doctor said. ‘If you’d like to follow me…’

Ken scratched his itching palms as he followed after the doctor, walking at a casual pace.

Ken’s breath was short and shallow, and he felt sick with nerves.

They came to the door.

The doctor stopped and turned to him.

‘He’s awake and responsive’ he told Ken. ‘I’ll leave you to it.’

He walked away.

Ken watched him go.

He turned back to the door, taking a slow and deep breath to calm his nerves.

He raised his hand, pushing the door open, he entered the room.

Mustang turned his head slowly towards Ken as he stepped forwards, a slow smile spread across his face as Ken approached.

Mustang was in a small room with only four beds, two of which were empty, one of which was occupied by a young woman fast asleep.

Ken approached and stopped beside Mustang’s bed, staring down at him. He looked exhausted, his red hair loose around his shoulders and hanging flat. His skin was pale and his eye sunken.

‘It’s good to see you’ Mustang whispered feebly. ‘How do you feel?’

Ken drew another slow breath, holding the edge of the bed in a firm grasp.

‘They said I was dead for seven minutes’ Mustang told him. ‘They said…that if you hadn't been there…that I would be in the morgue by now.’

‘Why?’ Ken spoke in a whisper, not trusting his voice. ‘Why did you…?’

Mustang blinked slowly.

‘Ken…’

‘Why would you put your life at risk like that?’ Ken whispered, meeting his eyes. ‘Why would you do that? Why?’

Mustang stared at him in shock.

‘Was it…?’ Ken began, looking away, ‘because of something I said?’

‘No’ Mustang uttered. ‘It’s nothing like that.’

‘Then why?’

‘I have problems in my life’ Mustang told him shortly.

‘What problems are bad enough to make you put your life at risk like that?’ Ken hissed, his voice breaking as he gripped the edge of the bed harder. ‘There are people in your life who love you. How could you do that to them?’

He wanted to shout at Mustang, wanted to scream at him. But he dared not raise his voice, not here.

‘I was so scared for you’ Ken went on in a hushed voice. ‘So scared…’

‘I’m sorry.’

‘How could you do that? What if I hadn't been there?’

‘Ken’ Mustang spoke seriously. ‘You saved my life.’ He smiled then. ‘I guess that makes us even.’

‘Please Mustang…please……promise me you’ll never do anything like that again…ever again…can you promise me that Mustang….?’

Mustang stared at him, eyes wide. For the longest time he didn’t answer.

‘I'm sorry for what I did to you’ Mustang breathed. ‘Earlier when……that wasn’t me…I would never want to hurt you…I wasn’t myself……I'm sorry…’

‘I know’ Ken whispered. ‘I know you would never…’

Ken leaned forwards then, pressing his lips to his Mustang’s.

Mustang furrowed his brow, staring at Ken in surprise and uncertainty.

Ken leant back, standing straight again and releasing his grip on the bed.

He stared at Mustang hard.

‘Mustang’ he said. ‘I'm glad you're alright.’

‘Where have you been?!’

Ken pulled back uncertainly. He had only just walked through the door to his home, when his mother jumped on him. It was still late; the sun had not risen yet.

‘You’ve been out all night!’ his mother shrieked at him. ‘We were so worried!’

Ken leant back away from his mother as she towered over him, still standing in the doorway.

‘I'm sorry’ he stammered. ‘I….I sent you a message.’

‘We didn’t know you were going to be out all night!’

Ken closed the door behind him, keeping his head down and slinking past her.

‘Don’t you walk away from me’ his mother glowered, grabbing onto his arm.

Ken stopped, turning behind him he stared at his arm his mother held.

‘Let go of me’ he said levelly.

‘Where were you?’ his mother snarled.

Ken glanced up at her, feeling a little nervous by her side, almost feeling the anger radiating from her.

‘My friend was sick’ Ken spoke in a whisper. ‘He needed me.’

His mother’s expression was set. ‘It was *him* wasn’t it?’

‘Yes.’

She slapped him.

Ken stumbled, caught by surprise.

He stared at the wall, eyes wide in shock and disbelief, cheek burning. He couldn’t believe what she had just done. His mother had never hit him before, never, not even when he was young.

‘What's happening to you?’ his mother said, voice breaking. ‘You're not the son I used to know.’

Ken was enveloped by a sudden anger, gritting his teeth and turning back to her.

‘I am not a child’ he snapped. ‘Stop trying to control me!’

He left his home, storming out shortly after arriving and ignoring his mother as she called after him.

He went away to be alone.

Ken sat on the steps in the dark town, the stars shining overhead. The shops here were built in a circle around a fountain. It would normally be spewing water, but for some reason tonight, the pool was still.

As Ken stared at it, he found it strangely unsettling.

What's happening to me? He wondered miserably. *Why is this happening?*

He stared at his own hands, clasping them together slowly.

Why is this happening…?

‘Hey Ken!’ a voice called out to him then.

Ken was suddenly snapped out of his thoughts. Straightening he saw three of his friends waving at him from a distance, standing on the other side of the fountain.

They made their way towards him, moving in the light cast down from the streetlamps.

‘It is you!’ Anthony called as he approached. ‘What are you doing out here? Do you want to hang out?’

Ken rose to his feet, straightening.

‘What are you doing out so late?’ Ken asked them.

‘Drinking and having fun’ Neil smirked.
‘Hey man’ Chris said. ‘Are you alright?’
‘Yeah’ Ken smiled. ‘I'm fine.’

The next day, Ken rang Alyssa on his mobile.
She picked up after only a few rings, and was energetic and bubbly on the phone, the same as ever, happy to hear his voice.
‘Alyssa,’ Ken spoke flatly, ‘I need to speak to you. There is something I need to talk about.’
He waited for her in a quiet part of the town, heart hammering in his chest and palms sweating in his pockets. He let out a deep and steady sigh, his breath fogging in the air before him.
It was cold today.
‘Ken!’
His heart clenched in his chest, and he turned to face Alyssa, rising as she skipped up to him.
‘Ken. It’s so great to see you.’
His stomach sunk as she hugged him. He grasped her by the shoulders lightly, pushing her back gently.
‘Alyssa’ he said flatly. ‘I need to speak to you.’
‘About what?’ she said, concern in her voice. ‘Why are you so serious? Is something wrong?’
‘I don’t want to be with you anymore’ Ken said.

Chapter Eleven

She stared at him in shock, taking several moments to process what he had just said.
‘W-what?’
‘I don’t want to be with you anymore’ Ken said. ‘I don’t love you anymore.’
She stared at him, body frozen.
‘What?’ she said again. ‘I…how could you say that?
‘I've come to realise’ Ken spoke slowly, ‘marrying you……is not what I want.’
‘But why?’ Alyssa whispered, tears brimming in her eyes then. ‘How could to say such a thing?’ she said beginning to cry. ‘Why…what have I done?’

Ken stared at her with a flat expression. He had never made her cry before, and before this day, would have tried to comfort her.
But he came to realise as he watched the tears rolling down her cheek, that he truly felt nothing for her.
He did not love her. Not anymore. He began even to doubt, whether or not he loved her at all in the first place.
'But we're supposed to be married' Alyssa sobbed, crying into her hands. 'Why…? What have I done? This isn't you? Things were going so well…how could you say this to me…?'
She tensed then, glancing up at him, suddenly frozen. 'Is there someone else?' she asked him in a quiet voice.
Ken tensed slightly then, furrowing his brow at her.
She slapped him then, hitting him hard.
Ken's cheek burned as he turned back to face her.
'*I hate you*' she hissed through gritted teeth, before turning on her heel and storming away.

Ken stared after her, staring at the back of her head as he watched her go.
He turned and walked away.

Ken sat on a bench in the park somewhere else, crying silently as he leant forwards, elbows resting on his knees.
This was a quieter part of the park now, where few people walked by. He thought he would not be bothered here. But he was wrong.
'Ken?'
The tentative voice was one he knew all too well.
Ken wiped his eyes with the back of his hand, turning to face Mustang who stood behind him.
'Why are you crying?'
Ken gave a humourless laugh, turning away from him.
'Are you following me now?' he said glumly.
'Ha!' Mustang laughed. 'Don't flatter yourself.'
'What are you doing here anyway?' Ken asked him flatly, turning away from him and staring ahead again.

‘I was just visiting the graveyard.’

‘What?’

Mustang didn’t answer.

‘Did someone you love die?’ Ken asked tentatively.

‘No’ Mustang answered, standing behind him still.

‘Then why would you go there?’

The light breeze rustled the leaves of the tree hanging over him, the fallen leaves dancing around his feet.

Ken turned around, but saw that Mustang was gone.

Why do I feel like our paths are intertwined? He thought, facing ahead again.

Ken bowed his head, left alone to brood in silence.

That evening when he sat with his family for a meal, he felt extremely uncomfortable, something he had never felt before around his family.

He could feel their eyes upon him as they ate, constantly flickering towards him. Ken felt sick, as he forced himself to continue eating his food, until all of it was gone.

When his mother had cleared the plates away, she spoke to him at last. The entire meal prior to this, had been in complete silence.

‘Have you spoken to Alyssa?’ she asked bluntly.

Ken’s heart skipped a beat, as he forced himself to look her in the eye.

‘No’ he answered, trying to sound calm.

‘Why not?’

Ken bowed his head, avoiding her gaze.

‘Why?’ his mother demanded. ‘Why haven’t you spoken to her?’

‘I don’t know’ Ken answered quickly, ‘I just…I don’t know…’

‘You're supposed to marry Alyssa’ his mother spoke harshly. ‘What happened? Why have you suddenly changed your mind?’

Ken stared at his mother uncertainly.

‘Why are you so desperate for us to be together?’ Ken asked her. ‘It’s my life.’

‘I only want what's best for you’ his mother said to him.

‘Then why don’t you let me make my own choices?’

His mother fell silent, biting her tongue. Ken with increasing trepidation, saw how livid she was, barely containing her anger.

‘Ever since you met that boy with fake red hair’ she whispered dangerously, ‘you’ve changed. You’ve changed’ she repeated. ‘This is all his fault.’

‘He saved my life’ Ken told her. ‘Do you still wish I hadn't met him?’

‘You are not yourself’ his mother told him, ‘not since you met *him*.’

‘Why are you treating me like this?’

His father and siblings watched them silently, none of them intervening.

He went to his room after that, wishing only to be alone.

He was angry at his mother, angry with all of them, with his father and siblings for not defending him, with his mother for constantly berating him.

I hate this Ken thought angrily to himself. *This isn’t fair! I hate this. I hate them! Why are they doing this to me…?*

‘They’re always talking together’ Ken grumbled resentfully. ‘My parents and *her* parents……I never realised until now how controlling they are. They don’t understand at all. None of them do. I don’t love her anymore, I don’t know if I ever really did. But they’re still trying to get us back together…….even though she hates me now.’

‘Yup’ Mustang said casually, sitting opposite him at the table and slurping loudly on his milkshake. ‘Girls do that. They're very emotional I hear…not that I’d know myself mind you.’ He sat back, staring with bored eyes up at the ceiling. He had paused in slurping through his straw loudly to speak that sentence, before continuing to slurp.

He paused again.

‘Isn't this the coffee house you visited with your girlfriend?’ he wondered aloud.

‘So?’ Ken shot angrily. ‘Are you even listening to me?’

‘This is weird’ Mustang said ignoring Ken as he gazed about him with narrowed eyes, taking in every detail around him, before his attention returned to Ken. ‘Hey. This is kinda like a date. You're not falling for me are you?’

‘Hu’ Ken glowered, knowing somehow he would say something like that. ‘You wish.’

‘Because I wouldn’t mind if you were’ Mustang went on, locking Ken with a seductive glare. ‘I actually find you kind of handsome.’

Ken narrowed his eyes.

‘Why are you like that?’ he asked.

‘Like what?’ Mustang asked innocently.

‘So open. You always speak your mind no matter what's on it. And that time ages before when we first met and you kissed me. No one else would do that.’

‘No one else is me’ Mustang smirked.

‘It’s like you don’t care about anything at all’ Ken went on. ‘Why *did* you kiss me?’

Mustang shrugged casually. ‘I just felt like it.’

Ken sighed heavily, slumping back in his seat, hand going to his head.

‘Oh Mustang’ he said wearily. ‘You only think with your cock.’

He froze suddenly then, realising what he had just said

‘I don’t know why I said that’ he mumbled.

‘Looks like you're changing more than you thought’ Mustang told him. For a split second he too seemed surprised by this outburst.

‘The truth is’ Ken began reluctantly, bowing his head, ‘I'm jealous of you. You're so carefree…so free……I wish I could be the same. I wish I had your life.’

‘No’ Mustang replied in a mumble. ‘You don’t.’

‘Why?’

‘You don’t want my life’ Mustang told Ken. ‘Trust me.’

‘But you seem so happy.’

‘Aren’t you?’

Ken faltered then.

‘I never realised how strict my parents were’ Ken mumbled. ‘I thought I was happy…until I wanted something they didn’t.’

‘If your parents really cared for you, then they will accept you no matter what.’

No matter what…

‘Why *did* you leave your girlfriend by the way?’ Mustang asked.

‘It just…’ Ken began, hunching his shoulders and turning his head away, ‘…didn’t feel right.’

Mustang stared at him, adopting the same bored expression as before, and continuing to slurp as loudly as possible through his straw.

‘My parents do care about me’ Ken said absentmindedly, more to himself than to Mustang. ‘If I just talk to them…maybe tell them the real reason I left Alyssa….’ He bit his lip. ‘I'm sure they would understand……I'm sure of it...they’re my family…they love me…’

His mother slammed his head against the table, nails digging into his skull as she pushed down on his head painfully.

‘What the hell is the matter with you?!’ she screamed at him. ‘How could you say such a thing?!!’

Ken stared wide eyes straight ahead of him, tears shimmering in his eyes as he lay forwards on the table.

‘Y-you're hurting me…’ he uttered.

His mother pulled him back, turning him around and slapping him.

‘You don’t mean that’ she hissed at him, grasping the front of his shirt in her fists, snarling at him in pure rage.

Ken stared back at his mother in shock, beginning to tremble in fear.

He had never seen his mother like this before, his mother had never raised her voice to him, let alone physically hurt him, and for the first time in his life, he was afraid of her.

‘Please…’ he begged, ‘please stop…’

‘How could you say such a thing?’ she repeated, shaking him violently with every word. ‘How could you?!!’

Behind his mother, the rest of his family stood in shock as they watched, though none of them stepped forward to protect him.

Ken was disowned by his entire family that night, and thrown from his home.

He wandered the streets, lost and alone, still in a state of shock.

Ken sat on a bench in the street a time after that. The main road before him had long since become deserted, and the town around him quiet, as the night began to descend.

‘Why?’ Ken uttered to himself, hand going to his head as his body began to tremble, only partly because of the cold. ‘Why is this happening to me….how…how could this have happened…?

‘You're a good man’ Alyssa gleamed at him, ‘and your family are good people.’

‘Oh stop’ Ken mumbled shyly, picking up his cup of coffee and sipping at it. ‘You're really too good to me.’

‘You're good to me’ Alyssa said to him, reaching for his hand across the table and grasping it firmly in her own. ‘Very soon we’ll have a house of our own and children. Our parents have it all planned out.’

‘And…’ Ken asked slowly. ‘Is that what you want?’

‘Yes of course it is’ she gleamed without hesitation, looking ever more beautiful as she smiled. Her long corn coloured hair fell about her shoulders, as her blue eyes shone from the

light through the window outside. 'My parents said to me it's what a woman should do. Find a good man to marry and have children with. This is my life's dream.'

'As is mine'

'How could I have been so stupid?' Ken whispered. He touched his cheek tenderly where he had hit the table. It was still very sore. Ken was sure it had bruised.

He bowed his head, hidden beneath his hood, and began to cry silently.

How could my family do that to me? How could they disown me so easily…I thought they loved me……?

And then he thought back to his stupid dreams.

'That wasn't what I wanted at all…' he mumbled, 'I just…thought it was…because my parents made me believe so…'

I can't believe I was so stupid.

Ken raised his head then, hearing a strange tune sung on familiar lips. He saw Mustang sauntering his way, singing the tune from Loituma and spinning a leek in his hand.

Ken lowered the hood further over his head, slipping his hands in his pockets and sitting back on the bench, trying his best to remain invisible.

Oh please…of all the people… he gritted his teeth. *Why him…?*

He saw as Mustang walked by him, he didn't see as Mustang's attention lingered on him for the briefest moment before moving on, continuing to spin the leek in his hand and sing.

Strange song.

Ken huffed to himself, closing his eyes and resting. He thought he might stay here for a while. There was after all, nowhere else for him to go.

Maybe my family will look for me he thought. *Maybe they're worried…maybe.*

It was many hours he stayed there. The night's chill was setting in; Ken could feel its touch creeping into his bones, reaching as far as the very organs in his body.

He sighed deeply, his breath appearing as a fog before him. His fingers in his pockets felt frozen, and he shivered violently.

Oh gods he thought miserably. *It's so cold…*

And then a dark thought reached him.

What if I fall asleep and die in the cold?

And then an even darker thought occurred to him.

Would my family care?

He heard a noise then. Ken raised his head slightly, heart jolting as he recognised Mustang coming his way again from the other way this time. This was the path to his home Ken realised. Of course he'd come this way.

Ken bowed his head again, pulling his hood tighter and willing himself to be invisible again, willing Mustang to ignore him again. But as before, Mustang's attention lingered on Ken again, only this time in his drunken state, he tripped just as he was passing him, landing ungracefully on his face.

Ken stared down at him in surprise. He didn't look away as Mustang turned his head up to him, recognition flickered across his face.

'Ken!' he sang jovially. 'Is that you?!'

Ken's heart sank in his chest as he turned his head away. But by then it was far too late.

'Hey' Mustang said tenderly, rising to his feet and lowering Ken's hood with both hands to see his face.

Ken looked up at him.

'Ken?' Mustang said with concern. 'Have you been crying?'

Ken had been crying for hours, so long that his tears had dried up. But his eyes were still red.

'What happened?' Mustang asked tenderly, withdrawing his hands.

'Why do you care?' Ken snapped angrily turning away.

'Because…' Mustang said, kneeling before him. 'I care about you.'

Ken could not stifle his sob at that, biting his tongue hard to control himself, awash with emotion.

'Ken…'

He leant forward suddenly, hugging Mustang tightly, grasping him hard as if he might lose him forever if he let go.

'Mustang…' he sobbed. 'I'm sorry…'

'You're freezing cold' Mustang said with concern.

Ken couldn't feel his fingers as he held onto Mustang, eyes wide and bloodshot.

'Did your family throw you out?'

Ken began to cry again as the pain cut into him, the way his family had so easily disowned him because of something like this.

How could they do this to me? How could they?

Ken clung onto Mustang tighter.

I thought they loved me…

‘Come on’ Mustang spoke softly looking into his face. ‘You can stay with me until you sort this out with your family.’

He rose to his feet, holding onto Ken’s hands and pulling him into a stand.

‘This might be a stupid question’ Mustang began, walking with his arm around Ken in order to keep him warm, ‘but do you have any stuff?’

Ken shivered violently in Mustang’s grip. Normally he would have actively protested at being so close to him, but his mind was a swirling mess right now, and he couldn’t think clearly, and he was freezing.

‘N-no’ Ken stuttered. ‘I've only got what I'm wearing.’

‘That’s ok’ Mustang whispered. ‘I’ll sort stuff out.’

They walked for a short time, they entered Mustang’s apartment and Mustang closed the door after them. Ken shivered on the doorstep as Mustang took his shoes off.

‘Come on’ Mustang said ushering him into the next room. ‘You have to have a hot shower now to warm you up. You're freezing cold.’

He led Ken towards the bathroom and shoved him in.

‘You can use my robe at the back of the door’ Mustang told him. ‘I'm just going out for a while. I’ll be back in about an hour or so.’ He paused. ‘You can work out how to use the shower yourself.’

He snapped the door shut and Ken was left alone.

He listened to the sound of receding footsteps, then the sound of the front door slamming shut, then silence.

Ken let out a heavy sigh, wondering in his head how on earth he had come to this situation.

Staying at Mustang’s place…of all things….

He pulled his hoodie over his head and began to undress, stepping into the shower and turning on the water.

It felt strange against his skin at first, his body was so cold. It took several minutes for his body to heat up; the water at first scolded him, though it wasn’t that hot.

When he had finished, he took the bathrobe that hung at the back of the door and put it on.

He left the bathroom, and began to wander the rest of the apartment. Mustang wasn’t back yet, and the place was eerily quiet around him.

Ken began to look around.

It was a nice apartment, simple, though a little bigger than the one his parents had. Ken came to the mantelpiece where there were pictures.

Ken reached towards one of them, picking it up and gazing down at it. The picture was several years old, the boy in it was younger; the hair was different. But there was no mistake, this was Mustang, but his hair wasn't bright red, but black, most likely its natural colour.

Ken looked to the other figures in the picture. There was a couple standing behind him who must have been his parents, and a girl younger than him in the picture beside him.

His sister?

Ken stared at her face. Yes, this was defiantly his sister. They shared the same features.

The front door opened then and Ken turned, waiting nervously for a figure to appear. He relaxed slightly when he saw that it was Mustang.

'I thought that might be one of your family' Ken sighed as Mustang sauntered into the room. 'It would be awkward to explain to them why I'm here.'

'I live here alone' Mustang told him. 'My family don't come here. I told you that.'

Mustang approached him, handing him a plastic bag.

'Here' he said pressing it into his chest. 'It's for you.'

'What's this?' Ken asked nervously.

'Open it and see.'

Ken did so, feeling slightly nervous as Mustang watched him.

'A toothbrush' Ken said flatly pulling it out of the bag. 'And toothpaste.'

There was also a towel in there, socks, jeans and a few shirts.

'This is for me?' Ken asked in surprise.

'Yeah' Mustang said. 'Sorry I didn't buy you any pants. I thought that might be a bit weird.' He smirked. 'Looks like you're going to have to go commando. Don't worry' he added. 'I do it all the time.' He paused then. 'On second thoughts…maybe you can wear *my* pants.'

'The only shop that's open all night' Ken said slowly, ignoring what he had said, 'is the one on the other side of town.' He looked up. 'You went all the way there for me?'

'Yeah.'

'But why?'

'Because you needed me to.'

Tears came to his eyes again. Ken dropped the bag on the floor, lifting his arms around Mustang and hugging him.

'Thank you' he whispered. 'Thank you.'

'Hey' Mustang smirked, patting him on the back. 'It's ok.' He pushed him away gently. 'I never knew you were so soppy.'

'I'm sorry' Ken uttered, shoulders beginning to tremble. 'It's just…been so hard lately.'

He flinched then as Mustang brushed his cheek suddenly, becoming very silent.
Ken raised his head, eyes wide and teary.
Mustang caressed his cheek tenderly, running his thumb across Ken's lower lip.
'Ken….' He whispered.
Mustang bowed his head. Ken drew a slow intake of breath as Mustang moved closer, lips hovering over his.
'No!' Ken spoke sharply, pressing a firm hand to Mustang's chest and holding him back. 'Don't…' he whispered.
'I'm sorry' Mustang mumbled, taking a step back. 'I won't if you don't want me to.'
He turned away.
'Come with me. I'll show you to your room.'
Ken trailed after him, pausing to go back for the bag he had dropped before following him.
Mustang's apartment was small, but it was comfortable. There were three bedrooms.
'You can have this one' Mustang said pausing at one of them. 'It was supposed to be mine, but I use to master bedroom. The bed's bigger.'
Ken hovered in the doorway, gazing into the dim room. Mustang reached for the switch at the wall and turned the light on. Inside Ken saw a small room with a bed and a bedside table beside it. There were a few pictures on the wall of generic nature scenes, and some ornamental vases with twisted branches coming out of the top. It looked pleasant in the room, but it was clear at a glance that no one stayed here. It had that 'empty' feeling about it.
'This is your room?' Ken mumbled.
'It was' Mustang replied. 'I stay in that room now' he pointed to a door on the other side of the corridor. 'If you want me…just knock…no' he corrected himself with a smirk. 'Just come in.'
'Thank you' Ken said not looking at him. 'This is very kind of you. I don't know how I can repay you.'
Mustang hesitated; then smiled.
'I'll see you in the morning then' he said to Ken, turning away and heading towards the master bedroom.
Ken watched him go, watched Mustang close the door, and listened to the following silence, before facing ahead again.
He stepped forward into the unfamiliar room, closing the door behind him quietly.
There were no windows in the room, the only light came from the bulb above him.

Ken placed the bag he carried on the floor, lying on his side on the bed without changing, hugging the pillow to him.

Are my family worried about me? He thought miserably to himself. *Are they thinking about me?*

He sighed then, turning his head into the bed and closing his eyes.

'I'll talk to them in the morning' he mumbled hopefully. 'After college.'

Ken went to college the next day, carrying with him what little he had, the same clothes from the night before, his mobile and some money, but nothing else. He had left everything behind at home.

He told some of his friends what had happened, and they tried to comfort him, encouraging him, telling him everything would be alright, and that his family would forgive and accept him.

Ken began to believe their words, but when he went home later that day, he found his family refused to even speak to him, none of them, not even his siblings.

A box had been left outside the house, inside it were some of Ken's belongings, his clothes and shoes and hair and toothbrush. Ken tried to enter the house, banging on the doors and windows, but he was ignored, and the house was locked.

Eventually Ken gave up. Instead, he took the box, and carried it away.

He went back to Mustang's apartment after that, entering without invitation, and going to the bed he had slept on the night before, dumping the box in the corridor along the way.

He lay there now, resting on his side and crying into the pillow he hugged to him.

So caught up was he in his misery and grief, he did not hear Mustang enter the apartment, nor did he hear him stepping through the corridor; then enter the room.

He only realised his presence, when Mustang touched his arm, leaning over him with an expression of concern.

Ken rolled over, gazing up through teary eyes.

Mustang drew his hand back.

'What am I going to do?' Ken pleaded. 'My family…they have rejected me.'

'It's alright' Mustang spoke soothingly, doing so with sincerity that Ken thought incapable of one so carefree. 'You can stay here, for as long as you want.'

'But…' Ken whispered, 'you won't mind having me here?'

'No' Mustang replied quietly. 'You can stay here forever if you wish.'

Ken let out a sob, sitting up and embracing Mustang.
Mustang bowed his head, holding Ken back.

Chapter Twelve

Ken leant against the wall outside registration, waiting for the teacher to turn up. He avoided everyone's eyes as they waited around him for the same thing, hands in his pockets and staring at his feet.
The last few days had been very difficult for him. Since his family had thoroughly washed their hands of him, and Mustang had allowed him to stay with him, it had not been easy, and it took a long while to adjust to this new life. He still had not yet adjusted.
What am I going to do? He worried to himself, not for the first time. *I can't stay with Mustang forever…even if he says…* he bowed his head with regret. *I have to look after myself…*
'Hey Ken.'
He was suddenly snapped out of his thoughts by the voice of his friend who had shuffled closer to him to talk.
'Hey Bill' Ken replied meekly.
'Are you living with Mustang?'
'W-what?' Ken stammered, caught off guard by the bluntness of the question, whole body suddenly tense. 'W-why would you say that?'
'I've noticed you take a different route to college now' Bill answered, tilting his head as he spoke to him. 'You come to college almost always with Mustang now. Don't you live with your family anymore?'
'Well…' Ken began reluctantly. 'You see…the truth is…'
Mustang suddenly materialized right on queue beside Ken, leaning into him and placing an arm around Ken's shoulders.
'The truth is' Mustang finished for him, 'we're living together…and we're going out.'
Ken suddenly choked, suddenly lost for breath and going bright red, mostly in fury.
'WHAT!?'
'Come on darling' Mustang teased, tickling Ken under the chin. 'You know it's true.'
Ken shoved him away then, doing so violently and causing Mustang to almost topple over.

‘That is not true!’ Ken snapped furiously, balling his fists.

Mustang waved his arms like a windmill as he tipped precariously backwards on his heels, regaining balance before straightening again. ‘Oh come on’ Mustang spoke, utterly serious. ‘What about all the things you said last night about how much you loved me?’

If it was possible for Ken to go any redder, he did now.

He gasped for several moments in utter shock, painfully aware that everyone around them was listening now.

‘That-that…*did not* happen! That never happened! I swear that never happened!’

‘The more you try to deny it the guiltier you are’ Mustang sneered seductively, threatening to move closer.

I hate you I hate you I hate you I hate you…!

‘You made me feel as giddy as a school girl last night’ Mustang continued, adopting a shy pose, putting a finger to his lips, looking timid and resting a toe on the floor, swinging his heel back and forth. ‘I've never seen such an animal-side before…you were savage…you wouldn’t stop even when I said no…and the size…I thought you would tear me apart…’

Ken could take no more. He strode up to Mustang and grabbed him by the shoulder, gripping has hard as he could, wishing nothing more than to shut him up, but not knowing how…

Mustang only stared at him with a calm expression. But even so, Ken could see a smile play about his lips, tweaking the corners of his mouth.

‘I. Will. Kill. You. For. This…’ Ken spoke through gritted teeth. ‘I. Swear…’

‘What is going on here?’

Ken tensed then, recognising the voice of the teacher who stood right behind him.

He let go of Mustang swiftly, and darted away down the corridor, heading as far from the teacher and the others who had heard the conversation as possible.

He came to be outside, stepping out into the bight day. Ken kept jogging, slowing only when he had run out of breath. He leant forward now, doubled over with his hands on his knees as he huffed, cheeks burning.

It took several minutes to get his breath back. When he did at last, he straightened up, letting out a deep sigh.

‘Found ya!’

Ken instantly ground his teeth, recognising the voice of Mustang.

He turned glowering as Mustang came his way, sliding down the bank of a steep slope near him with his arms out and stumbling ungracefully his way.

‘Hey. Wacha doing here?’ Mustang sang happily when he had reached him.

‘Trying to get away from *you*!’

‘Well you didn’t do a very good job of it’ Mustang replied flatly.

‘How could you do that?!’ Ken yelled at him. ‘How could you do that in front of *everyone*?!’

‘Keep your voice down’ Mustang waved at him as if placating a panicked animal. ‘And anyway, why do you care so much what other people think?’

‘Because I live in this world with *other people*.’

‘Yep’ Mustang said casually, staring off into the distance and speaking in a bored tone, scratching at the back of his head. ‘Other people are a hassle sometimes.’

‘You're one to talk’ Ken huffed. ‘You should know better than anyone.’

Mustang froze then, staring intently at Ken. He lowered his hand then, moving closer to him. Ken backed against the wall; staring back at Mustang hard as he trapped him there, arms either side of Ken as he leant forwards against the wall.

Mustang smirked at him, tilting his head forwards, leaning closer to Ken.

‘I’ve come to realise’ he spoke in a purr, ‘how handsome you are.’

‘Stop it’ Ken ordered, speaking shortly. ‘You keep telling me that.’

‘Why?’ Mustang whispered, lips hovering over Ken’s. ‘You look so cute when you're vulnerable like this.’

Mustang pulled back slightly, gazing into Ken’s eyes.

‘Ken…’ he breathed, ‘…I love you…’

Ken’s heart tightened in his chest and his eyes widened. He clenched his jaw, palms beginning to sweat.

‘How…’ Ken whispered, ‘how can you say that?’

‘Because it’s true’ Mustang replied without a seconds pause.

‘You don’t know what you're talking about.’

Mustang turned his head away suddenly, hearing his name being called.

Ken’s attention slid past Mustang, and to a figure in the distant, standing and waving there.

Not another one Ken thought in his head.

‘Roy!’ Mustang cried, straightening and moving away from Ken, completely distracted now.

Ken let out the breath he had been holding, body suddenly relaxed as his shoulders slumped.

He pushed himself off the wall, watching as Mustang darted away and into the arms of the man that had called out to him. Mustang kissed the man deeply, the two each holding the other tightly to them.

Ken watched the two break apart, holding hands and running off to whatever business they would get up to.

‘Tch’ Ken grimaced. ‘So much for loving me.’ He caught himself then, heart skipping as he realised something.

Am I feeling jealous?

He shook his head.

‘No. Of course not. That’s just stupid.’

He pondered then, wondering what he should do.

…….should I go to class? He wondered. *Could I face it?*

In the end he decided he needed to be alone. His mind was a scrambled mess, and he felt so conflicted.

I must really be changing Ken realised, staring at his own reflection in the pond beside him. *I've never skipped class before*.

He had come to a quiet place now. After his encounter with Mustang that morning, Ken’s wandering feet had taken him out of the college grounds, and out of the town altogether.

Now he was in the open and peaceful land just beyond the town. There were a few main roads leading to and from the town, but in between, were quieter patches, where trees grew, and little streams ran.

Ken let out a sigh, leaning forwards and hugging his knees. He stared with eyes unfocused at the tall grass that grew at his feet, swaying in the light and cool breeze. He felt the tall grass tickle the back of his hands, and listened to the little birds calling to one another as they flitted through the air and danced back and forth from the bushes that grew nearby, to the branches in the trees and back again.

Ken leant back, resting on his back and gazing up at the slow clouds drifting lazily above him.

Ken let out a slow breath, and closed his eyes.

He lay there for hours, in blissful peace and serenity, the day around him beautiful and bright.

Chapter Thirteen

Ken left the open fields beyond the town, and returned to Mustang’s apartment when it began to grow dark.

He stood before the apartment complex, gazing up at the door, one of several lined up on the second level. Mustang's apartment.

…and now my home Ken thought glumly.

He bowed his head, trudging forwards wearily and up the stairs.

He came to the second level, walking down the path below the flickering lights. He paused before the correct door and opened it.

It was dark inside the apartment. Ken glanced to the side, seeing Mustang lying back against the sofa with his leg over the back.

He turned his head slowly towards Ken, who stood in the doorway watching him. Mustang lay there shirtless; his lean and muscular chest was bare. It was a hot evening, and the air felt humid.

Ken saw on the floor beside Mustang several empty bottles. His attention flickered back to Mustang. Ken was about to speak, when another figure entered the room.

Ken immediately recognised the figures as the one he had seen earlier that day, the one that had called Mustang to him.

'Hey' Roy said, sucking on a cigarette. 'What are you doing here?'

'He lives here' Mustang slurred, swinging his head.

'Does he want to join in?' Roy asked.

'Nah' Mustang said, '…he's not into that sort of thing.'

'Hm' Roy said. 'That's a shame.'

Ken closed the door behind him, glaring at Mustang. 'Have you no self respect?'

'Clearly I don't' Mustang grumbled, turning away.

It seemed they had quickly forgotten about Ken then, as Roy knelt on the sofa, leaning over Mustang.

Ken turned his head away, dropping his bag by the front door and marching away as the couple began to kiss.

He went to the room that was now his, closing the door behind him and lying down on the bed.

It was dark in the room, and Ken sat there quietly, resting his head on his folded arm, listening to the noises coming from beyond the door.

He fell asleep shortly after.

He didn't know how much time has passed until he was woken again. Ken jerked as he woke abruptly, turning on his back to see Mustang leaning over him, shirtless, but thankfully with the rest of it still on.

'Shhh' Mustang placed his fingers over Ken's mouth as he drew a breath to talk. 'It's alright. He's gone now.'

'You reek of sweat' Ken hissed, grabbing his shoulder to push him again, but Mustang's hand curled around his wrist to stop him.

'It was hot' he smirked, 'really hot.'

'Don't touch me' Ken snapped, raising his voice.

'But I want you' Mustang drooled, grabbing Ken's other wrist and leaning closer to him, bearing over him.

Ken who had been trying to sit up, slumped back down onto the bed, glaring at him.

'I want you' Mustang moaned at him, tightening his hold on him, nails digging in. '…I want you…'

'You're drunk' Ken told him shortly.

'And you're handsome….'

Ken tensed suddenly, balling his fists as Mustang placed his lips over his mouth. He turned his head away, breaking away and drawing a deep breath of air.

'Don't…' Ken shuddered. 'Don't touch me.'

Mustang remained where he was frozen, leaning over Ken, still holding him by the wrists, but his grip had loosened.

Ken turned to face him now. 'Get off me' he ordered Mustang. 'Now.'

Mustang hesitated, before obeying, leaning back and crawling away from Ken. He sat on the edge of the bed, resting his elbows on his knees.

'I know I'm drunk' Mustang slurred, 'but I won't do anything to you…l…not if you don't want me to…' he turned back to face Ken then. 'I really do love you.'

'How can you say that when you don't even know me' Ken glowered. 'You shouldn't say such things lightly. Love is not something to be passed around so casually.'

Mustang stared at him blankly, slowly processing Ken's words with his slowed mind. He smiled then.

'Those are wise words.' Mustang sighed wearily. 'I like you coz you're different. You really care about your life, you're so…sophisticated, so proper……not like me.'

'But you chose to be wild' Ken reasoned, speaking calmly now. At first he had felt a little nervous when he had first seen Mustang in his room, now he was relaxed, knowing that

Mustang had control over himself. ‘You could be proper if you wanted. I don’t think its right for you to flaunt yourself around. Don’t you have any self respect? How can you just give yourself to so many people?’

‘Why?’ Mustang smirked, turning back to face him. ‘Are you jealous?’

‘I'm being serious’ Ken said sternly. ‘If you went to college on a regular basis, and actually did something with your life…’

‘What do you want to do in the future?’ Mustang interrupted.

‘Me?’ Ken was caught suddenly off-guard. ‘I…’

‘Come on’ Mustang prompted playfully. ‘Tell me. You’ve never told me before what you wanted to do when you leave college. Are you going to go to university?’

Ken sat up against the headboard, hugging his knees to his chest

‘I….I’ve always wanted to be a graphics designer’ he admitted. But…my family had other plans for me. They wanted me to work for the church.’ Ken smirked then. ‘Maybe this is a good thing…me being here…I was devastated when they kicked me out…but maybe…in the long run……it’s for the best. I've never realised how overpowering and controlling they were until I stood up for myself.’

‘You think it’s a good thing being in my bed?’ Mustang smirked, having only caught part of what Ken had just said.

‘I'm sad they're gone from my life’ Ken continued, choosing to ignore Mustang’s comment. ‘But I think that in time…I won’t miss them anymore.’ Ken smiled. ‘I’ll miss my siblings…but they’ll be alright without me.’ He looked up at Mustang then, who was leaning back on his hand. ‘I've never told anyone before what I wanted to do once I left college…you're the only one.’

Mustang turned very slowly to face him, a sly smile spreading over his face as he watched Ken silently.

‘What do you want to do in the future?’

Mustang just stared at him.

‘Mustang?’

‘I don’t have a future.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I just…’ Mustang paused then, biting his lip as he thought. ‘I live only for the now.’

‘Yeah’ Ken said flatly. ‘I can tell.’ Ken sighed. ‘You know, you could be a better person if you tried, if you had some self respect and didn’t act like an animal.’

‘You think I act like an animal?’ Mustang repeated, sounding genuinely concerned, as if he hadn't realised it before.

‘You don’t care about yourself’ Ken pressed. ‘You're cheap. Doing those things to who knows how many people. Can you even count all the people you’ve been with on your hands?’

Mustang frowned. He didn’t look at Ken, but Ken could tell that he was really thinking about this, and taking his words seriously.

‘No one’s ever been so honest with me’ Mustang mumbled after a time, ‘they just…’ he trailed off, before raising his head again. ‘Do you care about me?’

‘What?’

‘Do you care about me?’

‘I…’ Ken began, ‘…I guess I do.’

Mustang stared at him. Tears began to prickle in his eyes.

Ken blinked, staring back in shock at this.

‘I'm sorry’ Mustang huffed, turning away sharply, grinding his teeth. ‘It’s the drink.’ He went quiet for a moment. ‘I have sex with a lot of men’ he said casually, ‘but I don’t love any of them, and none of them love me.’ He turned back to Ken then, eyes clear. ‘You're different. I meant it when I said before that I loved you…I do…even more so now that…’ he clenched his teeth. ‘I will make you say that you love me’ Mustang told him. ‘You're so interesting. You are like a puzzle to me…’

‘You can’t make someone love you.’

‘I know’ Mustang said. ‘But feelings can change.’ He rose from the bed then, moving away and towards the door. He paused, glancing back. ‘Sorry to have woken you’ he said to him quietly. ‘I’ll leave you alone now.’

He went away, closing the door after him.

Ken stared at the closed door for several seconds, before lying back on the bed.

He couldn’t sleep properly for the rest of that night, and in the room opposite his, Mustang tossed and turned.

Chapter Fourteen

‘Uuuuhhhh!’

‘What's wrong’ Ken asked Mustang as he ate his breakfast, sitting at the table.

‘I've got the mother of all hangovers’ Mustang groaned, slouching across the kitchen and dropping heavily into the seat.

He slumped forward then, resting with the side of his face pressed against the tabletop and dribbling.

Ken pushed his cereal away and leaned around to get a better look at Mustang, seeing his sunken eyes.

‘Didn’t you sleep?’

‘No…’

‘You came into my room last night.’

‘Did I?’

‘Yes’ Ken replied flatly.

‘I don’t remember…’

Ken stared at him with a flat expression, leaning on his elbows with the spoon stuck in his mouth.

….convenient……

Later that morning, they walked to college together. Mustang walked briskly beside Ken, striding with his hands in his pocket, slowing down; then skipping ahead, before slowing down again, then skipping ahead.

‘Will you stop that?’ Ken glowered at him. ‘It’s annoying.’

‘Oh so you noticed me’ Mustang gleamed, flashing his perfect teeth in a grin.

‘How could I not?’ Ken slowed to a stop. ‘What are you trying to do?’

‘I just want to be noticed.’ Mustang spoke, sounding sincere now. ‘That’s all I want. I want you to notice me, to know I exist.’

‘I know you exist’ Ken spoke in a level tone.

‘I want more’ he breathed.

Ken flinched; he blinked once, gritting his teeth.

Mustang’s gaze bore into him, and he took the smallest step closer.

‘Ken…’

Someone grabbed onto Mustang from behind then, placing his hands over his eyes and giggling.

‘Guess who?’ the man said, as Ken watching took an uncertain step back.

‘Aidan?’ Mustang smiled beneath the hands.

‘Nope?’

‘Steve?’

The stranger let go of Mustang, coming around him and smiling.

‘Alan!’ Mustang gleamed, seeing him properly now. ‘What a pleasant surprise.’

‘How long were you going to keep guessing?’ Alan smirked, sliding closer to Mustang and pressing his body against his.

Jeez how many guys does he have? Ken thought to himself watching them. *It must be like a million or something.*

‘Why don’t we go back to my place?’ Alan suggested. ‘I can think of all sorts we can get up to.’

Mustang stared over his shoulder as Alan began to kiss his neck, moving his lips further down his shoulder.

‘Alan wait’ Mustang spoke urgently. He called loudly for Ken as Alan pulled back.

Ken who had walked away at that point, turned and glanced back.

‘What?’ he asked shortly.

Mustang pushed himself away from Alan, moving over to Ken and putting his arm around his neck in a playful gesture.

‘Alan’ Mustang said to him. ‘This is Ken. I can’t see you anymore, because I'm in love with him.’

Ken instantly went red.

‘I see’ Alan said, bowing his head. ‘Well then…’

Ken’s heart tightened in his chest as Alan sauntered up to him, moving dangerously close, their foreheads inches apart as he touched Ken’s chin, tilting his head back.

‘Mustang is a good man’ Alan said to Ken in a quiet tone. ‘I hope you look after him.’

Alan drew his hand back. He turned and drifted away then without another word.

When he was gone, Ken turned to Mustang who was still clinging to him.

‘W-what was that all about?’

Mustang let go of Ken, moving to stand in front of him.

‘I meant what I said Ken. I love you. I love you.’

‘D-don’t say that’ Ken mumbled, blushing further.

Mustang grabbed his hands suddenly, holding them before him in both his own.

‘*I love you*’ he said again. ‘I mean it. I want to be with you. I want you to want to be with me. I *will* make you say you love me. I will, if it’s the last thing I ever do.’

‘What?’

Have you lost your mind?

'I mean everything I've said' Mustang said to him finally. 'I promise, I wouldn't joke or lie to you about this.'

Ken stared back at him uncertainly, feeling his heart skip a beat.

What's up with this guy?

Later that day in college, Ken was sitting in class working. He frowned down at the paper before him, brow furrowed.

Damit, this is so confusing. I'm never going to understand this.

He grimaced then, forcing himself to smile.

'Um…' he began. 'Are you going to stare at me for the entire class?'

'Hm?' Mustang who had been sitting beside him, resting with his chin on his palm and facing him straightened then. 'What? You don't like it?'

Ken turned to him, a vein pulsing in his temple as he grew agitated with Mustang. 'Would you like it if someone was staring at you none stop?'

'Actually I would' Mustang grinned happily at him. 'I'd be flattered that I was that interesting and the soul attention for someone.'

'Hm.' Ken turned away. 'I suppose I should have known.'

Mustang's elbows slid slowly on the table then, until he was resting forwards on the table with his head upon his folded arms, still staring at Ken, never breaking eye contact.

Ken hunched his shoulders, feeling extremely uncomfortable being stared at all the time.

'Um' he said a few minutes later. 'Do you mind?'

'What?'

Ken looked at him. 'Can you not stare at me?'

'Why not? I think you're pretty to look at.'

'Shhh' Ken hissed sharply, clapping his hand over Mustang's mouth and glancing feverishly about him at the other students around. He couldn't be sure if anyone had heard.

Mustang gave Ken a strange look then, and he suddenly conveyed several emotions to him, mixed with amusement, happiness, and lust.

He was enjoying having Ken touch him.

Realising this Ken drew his hand back sharply, holding it to him.

Mustang let out the breath he had been holding when Ken first touched him. He smiled again.

'Look' Ken said patiently. 'Can you just…stop watching me?'

'Fine.' Mustang turned away, facing the other direction.

Ken sighed heavily, returning his attention back to his book.

He continued to work in peace for some time, until Ken glanced towards Mustang, who had not moved from his seat.

His heart jolted in his chest as he realised that Mustang was still watching him, in the reflection of a small mirror which sat on the wall. Ken saw the edges of his lips curl in a sly grin. Mustang licked his lips seductively then, winking at Ken as he saw him watching him.

Ken's heart tightened further in his chest, and his palms began to sweat. He felt his cheeks begin to glow and he stared hard at the open book before him, trying his best not to become distracted, though his thoughts were far away.

I mustn't look. I mustn't look. I mustn't look. I mustn't look……

When the lecture ended, Mustang leapt to his feet happily.

'Great! We're finished. That was exhausting…I'm so tired…'

'But you didn't do anything' Ken told him flatly. 'I'd tell you that you haven't even opened your books…but you didn't bring any with you.'

'I don't want to carry anything' Mustang sighed wearily, shoulders slumped. 'But…' he added happily, leaning forwards on the desk towards Ken, 'if you asked me to carry anything for you, I'd be more that happy.'

'Mustang' Ken began patiently, turning to face him now as the other students filed out of the room, some casting curious glances towards the both of them. 'Whatever you're trying to do, I think you're trying too hard.'

'What?'

'Just give me some space. Please.' Ken asked patiently. 'I can't handle you following me around all the time. It's suffocating.'

Mustang stared at him for several moments. He seemed a little shocked, hurt even.

'Alright' he said. 'I'll go away.'

He walked off without another word, and as Ken watched him go, he felt…he felt…

…regret…

Ken turned away, hand going to his head.

I'm so confused he thought miserably. *What should I do?*

He was alone now. Ken put away his books slowly, doing so in a mechanical fashion. He felt unhappy now, a heavy cloud stirring within him.

Where is my life heading? He thought. *What is going to happen to me in the future, I live with this man now, and…?*

‘What is my brother doing now?’ Ken mumbled to himself. ‘What is my sister doing? Are they thinking of me? Do they miss me…as I miss them?’

He lifted his bag over his shoulder, trailing out of the classroom. Even the lecturer had gone now, and the corridors were empty. It was a beautiful day, and most people were outside.

He went to find his friends now. There was one person in particular he wanted to speak to.

‘Andrew’ Ken said when he had found him.

His other friends sitting on the hill before the tennis court all greeted him. Ken acknowledged them only briefly, before turning back to Andrew.

‘Hey Ken’ Andrew replied, leaning forwards. ‘Are you alright?’

Ken bit his lip in worry, staring at the ground, unable to meet his gaze.

‘I…’ Ken began, ‘I was wondering…’ he drew a steady breath, forcing himself to be calm. ‘Do you know where my brother is?’

Andrew stared up at him. He rose then, stepping towards Ken and smiling at him.

‘Let’s walk together’ he said to Ken.

Andrew and Ken wandered around the back of the college where it was quieter, walking towards the steps in the shadows of the tall building before them.

‘Take a seat’ Andrew said to him, moving towards the vending machines nearby and slotting several coins in.

Ken lowered himself down onto the steps, putting his bag down by his feet. Andrew returned to him, sitting beside him and offering him a drink. Ken took the can, staring down at it as Andrew opened his own, drinking deeply.

‘Aaaahhh’ he sighed. ‘Refreshing.’ He turned to Ken, turning serious then. ‘So. What's on your mind?’

Ken glanced at him; then looked away again.

The can in his hand felt cold, a bead of moisture ran down the side. Ken clutched the can tightly.

‘I…’ he uttered. ‘I don’t know where to begin.’ His expression dampened, and he stared miserably down at his hand. ‘Andrew. I know we don’t hang out enough anymore, I know things have changed and that we’ve both been busy.’

Andrew watched him silently, completely unmoved.

‘Promise me you won’t not tell anyone what I'm about to tell you. Promise you’ll keep it a secret.’

‘I promise’ Andrew replied.

Ken looked away again. ‘You're the only one I feel I can tell…the others……they wouldn’t understand.’ Ken drew a steady breath. ‘You know…that I live with Mustang in his apartment now.’

‘Yes’ Andrew mumbled back. ‘I had heard something of the sort.’

‘My parents kicked me out, because of what I said to them.’

Ken explained everything to him, and Andrew listened in complete silence. When Ken was finished, he was trembling slightly from his nerves.

‘Please’ Ken said to him. ‘Please tell me you understand.’

Andrew bowed his head.

‘I do understand’ he said sincerely. ‘This is not the first story like this I've heard.’

‘It isn’t?’

‘No. There are many more people like you than you know.’

They spoke some more.

Ken sat on the steps hugging his knees to him, his drink which he had forgotten sat beside him, getting warm now.

‘I think I've missed my lecture’ Ken mumbled. ‘I guess it doesn’t matter.’ He turned to Andrew. ‘Thank you’ Ken said to him. ‘You’ve…really helped me.’

Andrew smiled widely up at him, eyes gleaming. ‘Anytime I can help’ he said.

Ken rose to his feet, picking up his bag.

‘I'm going now’ he said to Andrew. ‘I'm going to find my brother and sister.’

‘Just remember’ Andrew spoke to him carefully, ‘they are likely to follow whatever their parents say. Just be prepared for that.’

‘I will’ Ken nodded to him. ‘Thank you.’

He walked away then.

Andrew leant back, reaching for the can Ken had left behind and opening it.

He drank deeply from it, crunching the empty can in his hand and sighing deeply.

Andrew rose, bringing to his face the plague mask he brought from his bag, and walking away.

Ken left his college then, glancing at his wrist for the time. His brother and sister went to a different school than he did. Their parents had tried to get them placed in the same school together, but there had not been enough places, and so Ken had to go to another school.

He waited outside the gates for several hours, feeling butterflies in his stomach.

He leant back against the wall, hugging himself.

Since when have I been so nervous of meeting my own siblings?

Ken gripped his own arms tighter, nails digging hard into his skin.

Pull yourself together. Just get it together.

His stomach flipped over as he saw them suddenly. His brother and his sister walked side by side, heading away from him. Ken stared at their backs as they went, feeling sudden doubt within him.

Maybe I should let them go. Maybe I shouldn't talk to them.

'Walter!' he called out. 'Sue!'

They turned around, eyes widening at the sight of him.

'Ken!' his sister called out.

She ran to him and into his arms, sobbing into his chest.

'Ken…' she whimpered. 'Oh Ken…'

'I'm sorry' Ken said to her, feeling tears prickling in his eyes as he held her back. 'I'm sorry…'

'Our parents' Sue told him, 'mother, she wants nothing to do with you. We've tried to speak to her, but she won't listen.'

Walter came up behind Sue, standing before Ken. He smiled at him sadly, and Ken smiled back.

Sue let go of Ken, stepping back.

'I thought' Ken began tentatively; 'that you might not want to speak to me, might not want to know me anymore…after what I said.'

'You're still our brother' Walter said to him. 'We still care about you, but…I think it's best if we don't see each other again.'

'Walter!' Sue cried. 'How could you say that?'

'No' Ken spoke firmly, shocking her. 'He's right.'

'Ken' Sue uttered, tears shinning in her eyes.

'I'm sorry' Ken smiled at his sister. 'I'm just too different now. I'm not the person our parents want me to be. I cannot lie to myself anymore. I have to live my life as my own.'

And then Mustang's words rang in his mind.

Live your life as you should, not how others want. Live in the moment.

'Do you mean what you said?' Sue asked him tentatively. 'Is it really true?'

'Yes' Ken spoke quietly to her. 'I'm sorry. I've felt this way for some time. I can't pretend anymore that I'm different, I cannot deny who I really am.'

Walter stepped up to Ken then, lifting his arms and embracing him.

‘I'm sorry’ Walter whispered to him, blinking back his own tears as he held him. ‘I’m sorry things turned out this way.’

Ken smiled sadly as he held his brother.

Walter stepped back, and Ken embraced his sister, just one last time.

‘Be happy’ Ken whispered to her, stroking her hair back lovingly. ‘I know it’s hard, but try your best to just forget about me. Don’t think of me again, pretend that I never existed.’

‘But Ken’ she sobbed, unable to hold back her tears.

‘Don’t worry’ Ken said to her, fighting back his own tears. ‘I’m happy now, happier than I was before. I never realised it…until things changed.’ He smiled. ‘Don’t worry about me, I have a place to live, and I'm happy. I promise. I would never lie to you.’

Ken and his siblings parted ways after that.

Ken walked alone, feeling a lump in his throat.

He left the centre of the town then, heading to the edges where it was quieter.

His wandering feet took him to a graveyard. He pushed open the wrought iron gates, they screeched as they swung open, and Ken stepped forward, following the path into the graveyard.

Here he found Mustang.

Ken paused then, seeing him sitting there with his legs crossed, resting in the shade of a tree.

He watched him for a moment, standing a distance away, simply watching.

After a time he stepped forward to make himself known, and Mustang, seeing movement, glanced around.

‘Hey’ he smiled as Ken approached.

‘What are you doing here?’ he asked.

‘Oh…’ Mustang mumbled, turning away, ‘nothing in particular…just……sitting.’

Ken frowned at him, raising an eyebrow.

‘Why are you here?’

‘It’s peaceful here’ Mustang said to him, ‘don’t you think?’

Ken stared at him for a few moments, before his attention drifted away, seeing the graveyard around them.

Everything was still, there was no breeze on this day, and the sun above them in the sky shone brightly down, lighting up the world below.

The grass around them was bright, the flowers dotted about the graveyard before the headstones were beautiful, and the sparrows flitting about the bushes here and there sung their melodies.

'It is' Ken mumbled, speaking to Mustang again, 'it is beautiful…'

Mustang smiled at him, glancing towards Ken only briefly, before looking away again.

'I know I live a wild life' he mumbled, 'but even I…at times…enjoy peace.' He breathed a heavy sigh then, closing his eyes for a moment, before opening them again. 'I love it here' he spoke, 'here…I get a different perspective of the world…and it is beautiful.'

Ken continued to watch him, saying nothing.

'I promise' Mustang said to him, suddenly changing the subject, 'I promise I'll behave myself. I'm trying to be sophisticated after all. Like you.'

Ken narrowed his eyes. 'I thought you didn't remember last night.'

Mustang faltered then, realising he had slipped up. He grinned then.

'Alright' he said. 'You caught me.'

Mustang rose to his feet, moving over to Ken, but stopping a few steps away.

'I love you' Mustang said to him. 'My feelings for you are genuine. I will make you see, but…' he smiled as he walked past him. 'I will give you space, I will respect your needs, as you want me to.'

He passed him by, pausing to glance back as Ken turned to face him.

'I love you Ken' Mustang told him. 'I love you.'

Mustang smirked, shoving his hands in his pockets. He turned and walked away, without another word.

Ken glared furiously after him, cheeks burning and balling his fists. He gritted his teeth, heart thumping in his chest.

Mustang……

Weeks passed, and to Ken's surprise, Mustang kept his word.

He still lived with Mustang, and went to college every day. His life returned to as normal a routine as it could have. He did not see his parents, and he did not see nor hear from either his brother or sister. It hurt him at first, but the pain was slowly beginning to ebb away.

But what he had told his siblings had been true. He was happy, despite everything.

One morning, on a day when he had no college, Ken spoke to Mustang.

'What do you mean you want a job?' Mustang asked him.

‘I would have thought that it was self-explanatory’ Ken replied flatly, cooking his breakfast slowly and watching Mustang who sat on the sofa.
He had slept on the sofa that night, having come home late as he had been out drinking.
‘I want to earn money’ Ken said to Mustang, flipping his egg over in the pan. ‘I don’t want to depend on you for food and everything. I want to provide for myself.’
Mustang sighed wearily, slumping back on the sofa and hooking his leg over the back.
‘I suppose that makes some sense’ he grumbled. ‘What sort of job did you have in mind?’
‘Anything’ Ken replied. ‘Just a few hours a week around my classes. I won’t be in college forever. I have to learn to look after myself. I have to decide what to do with my life.’
Mustang watched him closely as he spoke, resting his arm across his forehead, staring up at the ceiling.
‘Didn’t you say you wanted to be a designer?’ Mustang asked him.
‘Yeah’ Ken said. ‘But in the meantime, I need money now. I have to graduate from college first, and get good grades; then I can pursue my dreams.’
Mustang listened to Ken talk, hearing the spit of the oil in the pan, he sighed deeply, closing his eyes and becoming still.

Chapter Fifteen

A few weeks later

‘So you’ve got a job now’ Chris said to him.
‘Yeah’ Ken replied, sipping on his coffee as the four of them sat at the table in the café. ‘I was very lucky to find it actually.’
‘Where is it then?’ Neil asked him. ‘Tell us.’
Ken grinned at him. He glanced towards the waitress as she approached their table, smiling as she took their empty cups, placing them on the small round tray she carried. She was a pretty young thing, slender with long brown hair tied into a plait and held by a large pink ribbon. She looked very smart in her white dress and black apron the female staff here wore.
‘Is there anything else I can get for you?’ she smiled sweetly at them.
‘No thank you’ Ken said to her. ‘We’re fine.’
She paused then, eyes lingering on him, before moving away.

Anthony leaned forwards in his chair to get a better look at her as she moved away; turning back to Ken once she had gone. ‘You’ve got a job *here*?’ he said.

‘Yeah’ Ken smiled shyly, looking away. ‘It’s a good place to work as far as I understand. Everyone here is really nice. But I haven’t started work yet.’

‘Wow’ Anthony said glancing back to the waitress that had served them. ‘What a hottie. Maybe I should get a job here too.’

‘Her name is Tess’ Ken said. ‘She’ll be showing me tomorrow how everything works.’

‘As long as it doesn’t affect your studying’ Neil said to him. ‘Remember the exams are coming up.’

‘Yeah’ Ken grumbled. ‘Don’t remind me.’

‘Why did you get a job anyway?’ Chris asked him.

‘Well…’ Ken began. ‘I don’t live at home anymore. I live with Mustang.’

‘Uh’ Chris said. ‘That must be awkward. You know what he is right? He hasn’t tried anything funny with you has he?’

‘I know’ Ken smiled. ‘And no he hasn’t. He’s a bit of a pain sometimes, and a bit strange…but he’s good to me and he gives me space. But I can’t depend on him forever. I don’t live at home anymore, I need to learn to care for myself, then I can move out and get a place of my own.’

‘That would be so cool’ Anthony sighed. ‘My girlfriend and I are nearly ready to get a place of our own. She’s sick of her family, and to be honest I can’t blame her.’

‘They don’t like you do they?’ Chris said turning to him, the conversation shifting.

‘They’re a bunch of crazies’ Anthony said dramatically. ‘You know I swear that one day they went through the messages on my phone.’

Ken sat back with a smile, listening to Anthony talk. As he did his attention wandered, and he caught the attention of Tess again, who was by the tills now, serving a customer.

She smiled to him briefly, before turning away again.

Ken felt a flutter in his heart. He looked away briefly, before glancing back towards her.

‘So who is she?’

‘What? Ken fumbled. He hadn't expected to be interrogated the instant he walked through the door to Mustang’s apartment.

‘You know’ Mustang smirked, leaning on his shoulder uncomfortably, ‘that girl in the coffee shop.’

Ken glowered at him, pushing him off his shoulder and turning to him.

‘How do you know about that? Have you been watching me?’

‘As a matter of fact’ Mustang smirked, ‘I have.’

‘But why?’

‘I already said to you before’ he sighed. ‘It’s because I love you.’

Ken groaned, gritting his teeth and walking away.

‘I'm hungry’ Ken said. ‘I'm going to make something to eat.’

Mustang watched him walk away, still hanging by the door left open.

Mustang reached for the handle, closing the door slowly before walking down the hall and towards the kitchen. He stood in the doorway, watching Ken shuffle about the kitchen in a bored manner, taking out a pan from the cupboard, and several things from the fridge.

Mustang hung in the doorway, watching Ken from a distance, just standing there.

‘I start work tomorrow’ Ken was saying absentmindedly. ‘I’ll be able to earn money…and pay for my own food…thank you…’ he added hastily at that, ‘for everything. You’ve…really helped me out.’

Ken paused then, casting a glance towards Mustang.

‘I…’ Ken began, ‘don’t know where I’d be without you.’

Mustang raised his head at this; a strange expression crossed his face.

‘Ken…’

‘What?’

They stared at each other.

Mustang turned his head away. ‘Nothing’ he grumbled.

Ken straightened, frowning as Mustang suddenly walked away without explanation.

Ken arrived at work early, greeted by Tess who bounded happily up to him.

‘Hey’ she beamed, ‘you're here.’

‘Of course I'm here’ Ken laughed awkwardly at her, feeling nervous on his first day. ‘I work here remember?’

Ken put the few belongings he carried with him in his locker, before putting on his apron to start his shift.

It was busy, and Ken kept his mind on his task, working quickly.

Throughout the entire shift Tess kept close to him, guiding him, giving him instructions and helping him when he needed help. Ken began to feel a little more at ease as time went by, more so with Tess by his side watching over him.

Several hours passed, and everything was going well.

'Here' Tess beamed at him, passing him the cup of coffee. 'Give this to the gentleman on table twelve.'

'Sure' Ken nodded taking it from her. 'I'll be right back.'

He carried the coffee over to the table.

Ken froze suddenly, his brow twitching in annoyance as he saw who sat at the table.

'Hey!' Mustang waved at him.

'Mustang.' Ken put the coffee down before him. 'What are you doing here?'

'I was just checking on you' Mustang gleamed happily. 'I care about you. I just wanted to see how you were doing.'

'I'm fine' Ken said flatly. 'Is there anything else I can get for you?'

Mustang hesitated for only a moment before answering.

'No' he said at last. 'I'm fine.'

He lifted the cup to his lips, sipping it carefully and not taking his eyes from Ken as he did so.

'Well' Ken answered curtly, 'I'll see you at home then.'

Ken walked away, but he could still feel Mustang's gaze boring into the back of his skull. He knew now that Mustang would stay for ages, just watching him.

So annoying Ken thought gritting his teeth and trying hard not to notice.

A few hours later when Ken's shift was drawing to a close, he went back to the small kitchen to wash the cups.

'So is this your first job then?' Tess asked him as she skipped happily up to him.

There were fewer customers, and the place was quieter now.

'Actually, yeah' Ken said to her. 'It is.'

'I see' she grinned at him. 'You're doing really well.'

'You think so?' he said hopefully.

'Of course' she beamed at him.

He couldn't help it, but he smiled in turn. There was something about her joyous mood that was contagious. Simply being around her made him happy.

She's so pretty Ken thought as he stared at her. *And she's always smiling.*

Tess noticed his prolonged stare, she was grinning at him slyly, leaning against the counter.

'What is it?' she giggled.

Ken's heart skipped a beat, and he looked away sharply. 'It's nothing' he said hastily. 'So, what time does your shift finish?'

Ken's attention drifted back to her face as she answered his question in great detail, beginning to ramble on about other things as well.

And then his attention drifted past her, through the open door to the kitchen and out into the café itself where the guests sat. A then his mood soured as he saw Mustang sitting at the table by the window, still there, still watching him with a fixed expression, and never looking away.

Stupid Mustang Ken glowered as Tess continued to talk. *What's his problem?*

It was late by the time Ken's shift ended. He and Tess were the only ones working now, and she helped him close down the coffee shop.

'Gosh is that the time?' she sighed, brushing back her fringe and glancing to the clock. 'I didn't realise it was so late.'

'The time sure has flown' Ken said.

'I guess it's true when you have fun' she beamed turning to him.

'You had fun?' he asked.

'Sure' she smiled. 'Didn't you?'

He smiled back at her. 'Yeah' he said awkwardly. 'I guess I did.'

'So are you going home now?'

'Yeah.'

'Where do you live?' she asked him.

'With…' Ken began, '…um….in an apartment' he finished. 'It's not far from here.'

'Then can I walk you home?' she asked.

Ken chuckled at her. 'I'm the one who's supposed to offer to walk you home, isn't that what a gentleman does?'

'I want to see where you live.'

'Ok' Ken frowned at her in amusement.

'Then let's go' Tess laughed happily taking him by the arm. 'Come on, it's beautiful outside.'

They sauntered out the shop, Tess pausing at the door to turn the sign so that it read 'closed', locking the shop before walking arm in arm with Ken, though the quiet and still streets.

All around them, the lights gave out a gentle glow, bulbs hanging on strings over their heads, greens and yellows and blues.

‘The town is holding a festival tomorrow’ Tess said as they walked beneath the lights. ‘It’s going to be so beautiful, and so much fun.’ She giggled joyfully.

‘I don’t think I've ever met anyone so happy all the time’ Ken said, turning to her with a smile. ‘It’s quite contagious.’

‘Well why wouldn’t I be happy?’ she said, eyes glinting at him. ‘Life is wonderful after all.’

As they went, the two passed a hooded figure, silent and leaning back against one of the lamp posts with his hands in his pockets. They paid him no attention.

Tess let go of Ken then, running forward towards the fountain before them, twirling as she went, arms out wide and laughing.

Ken smiled as he watched her.

‘The night is so beautiful’ she cried, reaching up towards the moon as if wanting to take it in her arms. ‘So beautiful and…cold…’ she shivered then, hugging herself.

‘Here’ Ken said, offering his coat to her.

‘Thank you’ she said shyly, taking it from him and blushing slightly. ‘You're such a gentleman.’

The hooded figure leaning against the post straightened then, turning and walking away.

‘I don’t want to go home yet’ Tess said to him. ‘Can’t we stay out here for a while?’

‘Of course we can.’

‘Your family won’t mind will they?’

Ken hesitated then. ‘The truth is…I…’ he turned away.

‘I'm sorry’ Tess said, expression dampening. ‘Did I say something wrong?’

‘My family’ Ken began, turning back to her. ‘They…kicked me out. I don’t see them anymore.’

‘That’s awful’ Tess sighed, looking genuinely distressed to hear this. ‘How could they…why?’

‘It was because of something I said to them.’

‘So…where do you live now?’

‘With a friend’ Ken said casually. ‘His name is Mustang.’

‘Mustang?’ Tess giggled. ‘That’s a funny name.’

‘Yeah’ Ken smiled. ‘It is.’

Mustang walked away from them, drawing his hands out of his pocket and lowering his hood only when he was out of sight.

‘There you are’ came a silky voice.

‘What is it Troy?’ Mustang grumbled as he went, not slowing down for the figure that had appeared.

Troy jogged up beside him; then matched his pace as they walked.

‘Are those two little birds bothering you?’ Troy teased.

‘Mmm.’

‘Is that Ken?’ Troy interrogated, glancing back at him as he talked with Tess. ‘Is he the reason you haven’t been hanging out in ages?’

‘Mmm.’

‘Oh come on.’ Troy grabbed him around the waist roughly, turning him towards him. ‘He looks like he doesn’t want you. Look. Look how happy he is with her.’

Mustang couldn’t help casting one last glance towards the couple.

‘It’s true’ he mumbled regretfully. ‘They do look happy.’

‘See?’ Troy smirked, holding him tighter. ‘He doesn’t want you. Come on. You used to be so much fun.’

Mustang flinched then as Troy moved closer to him, running his tongue across his shoulder.

‘Troy…’ he uttered.

Troy grabbed Mustang by the chin then, turning his head sharply towards his, kissing him forcefully. But Mustang couldn’t turn his eyes away from Ken and Tess.

Troy broke away from him, following Mustang’s gaze. But by that time they were gone.

He turned his attention back onto Mustang, pushing him gently backwards until the back of Mustang’s legs touched the raised flower bed.

He leant back, resting against the soil as Troy leant over him.

Mustang tilted his head back, a single tear running from his eye as Troy trailed kisses down his body, caressing him, *tasting* him.

Troy straightened then. ‘Why don’t we take this back to my place?’

Mustang did not object. He allowed Troy to pull him from the flower bed, walking with him and away.

‘So that’s why you live with Mustang now.’

‘Yeah’ Ken mumbled. ‘I'm grateful for everything he’s done for me. But I want to set out on my own path now. I want to live on my own, and look after myself.’

‘It makes sense’ Tess gleamed. ‘That’s why you got this job.’

‘Yeah’ Ken said. ‘It is.’

The next day was completely normal, Ken went to his lectures, hung out with his friends, then when he had finished his last lecture, he left the college alone.

Ken decided to take the scenic route home, making the most of the beautiful day around him. The town was pleasant, and it was quiet at this time. Most people were at work or school, the streets were mostly empty, even the roads were silent.

Ken drew a deep breath, sighing heavily in contentment.

I love this town.

He wandered from the path, moving to the back of the shops in the shopping centre and to the park, leaping over a broken fence to the more wooded area, where it was completely deserted. The pine needles crunched beneath his feet as he went.

He came back to the open road, sauntering down the street and whistling to himself as he went.

He slowed then, glancing to the graveyard beside him, where he recognised a figure sitting beneath the trees.

Ken changed course, entering the graveyard through the gate and approaching the figure. Mustang glanced around, hearing the sound of someone approaching.

'You're here again?' Ken asked him. 'What are you doing?'

'What was I doing?' Mustang echoed, rising to his feet and dusting himself off. 'I was uh…praying.'

'Praying?'

'Yeah' Mustang said innocently. 'You know…when you talk to god?'

'I didn't think you the type.'

'Well…' Mustang smirked knowingly. 'There's a lot you don't know about me. I still love you by the way' he added hastily.

'Yeah yeah' Ken replied in a bored tone, turning to walk away again.

'Ken…?'

He paused, glancing back. 'What?'

Mustang approached him. Ken tensed as Mustang reached for him, hand going to his head.

'You've got a leaf in your hair' Mustang told him, pulling the leaf free and letting it fall.

'Thanks' Ken replied flatly.

'I saw you with that young woman last night.'

A flicker of annoyance crossed Ken's brow.

'Have you been following me?'

'No?'

‘It’s obvious!’ Ken barked, pointing an accusing finger at him. ‘It’s obvious that you have.’
‘It *is* obvious’ Mustang replied flatly. ‘I'm jealous.’
The two stared at each other.
Ken scowled at him, turning on his heel and marching away.
‘I'm going home.’

Chapter Sixteen

Days passed, and Ken and Tess had grown even closer. They were going out now, and their relationship was still very new. Tess adored Ken; she looked up to him, and as usual, was always happy, always smiling. Her joy was contagious, and she made Ken smile with her, without even meaning to.
He had settled in his job now, and Ken was happy.
After every shift he had with Tess, he would walk her home, or they would visit the town together.
‘I love you Ken’ she beamed, hanging off his arm and leaning into him. ‘I love you so much!’

The evening was growing late, and Mustang sat at the bar alone, staring into his drink. He had ordered several that night, and kept to himself, depressed and scared that he was losing Ken. He didn’t know what to do.
It was sometime later, when he was approached by a stranger who put his hand on him.
‘Hey, how’s it going?’
Mustang did not answer; he turned his head slowly towards the man, his vision slightly blurred.
‘You're handsome’ the stranger said to him. ‘How about you and me leave this place and go somewhere quieter.’
Mustang raised his head, blinking wearily up at the man.
Mustang flinched suddenly, as the man slipped his hand into the front of his trousers, caressing him, with the other hand pulling Mustang’s legs further open so that he could reach him.

It was loud in the club, and busy all around them. No one noticed the pair, as Mustang hunched his body over, head bowed over his drink and suddenly tense.

‘How about…’ she man suggested, speaking directly into Mustang’s ear so that only he could hear him, ‘we take this outside?’

The stranger withdrew his hand. Mustang did not resist as the man took him by the wrist, leading Mustang out of the bar and into the quiet alley at the back of the building.

‘It’s alright’ the stranger said, pushing Mustang back firmly against the wall, ‘everything is going to be alright.’

Mustang tilted his head back as the stranger unzipped his trousers, kneeling before him. A single tear ran down his cheek as he felt the stranger’s mouth close around him, beginning to work. Mustang dug his nails into the brick wall behind him, scratching lightly at the surface.

When the man had finished with him, he turned him around, bending him forwards over a wall and standing behind him. Mustang did not resist as he felt the man push into him, his skin hot and cheeks flushed, he stayed there and waited as the man had his way, thrusting into him forcefully.

After he had finished, the stranger wandered away, simply leaving him there.

Mustang sat outside now on the floor of the alley, leaning back against the wall.

He gritted his teeth, whimpering, speaking a single word, a name.

‘……Ken……’

Mustang went to home late that night, if it could still be called night. He stumbled into his apartment and collapsed onto the sofa, waking hours later to find Ken in the kitchen cooking.

‘Oh’ Ken said when Mustang groaned and began to shift, ‘you're awake.’

Mustang sat up gingerly, hand going to his head.

‘Awwwwww.’

‘Are you feeling alright?’ Ken asked him as he continued to cook. ‘What time did you come home last night?’

‘I don’t remember’ Mustang groaned.

‘Well did you have fun?’

‘I don’t remember.’

Mustang hauled himself off the sofa, rising to his feet and wobbling slightly before righting himself.

‘Aaaaawwwww.’

‘Are you hungry?’ Ken asked him happily.

‘Meeeeeaaaahhhh.’

‘Hey guess what?’ Ken grinned at him. ‘I've found a place to stay.’

Mustang tensed at that. ‘What?’

‘Here’ he said, pulling a page from his pocket and handing it to him. ‘What do you think?’

Mustang took the paper, staring down at it. It was an ad for an apartment near here; it looked small, but pleasant. It would have been perfect for Ken.

For the longest time he said nothing.

‘Mustang?’

Mustang looked up then, his eyes pleading.

‘Please don’t go’ he said, voice trembling as he spoke.

‘What?’

‘Please! I’ll be lonely without you here.’

Ken hesitated then. He wasn’t sure what to say.

‘But…’ Ken began at last, ‘…what about your family?’

‘I told you already!’ Mustang snapped at him, suddenly angry. ‘They don’t come here. Don’t ask about them again!’

Ken stared back at Mustang in shock. He gasped suddenly, seeing the clock on the wall behind him.

‘Oh! Is that the time?’ he said. ‘I have to go to work now.’ He ran to the door, pausing then and glancing back at Mustang. ‘I’ll eat when I get back’ he said. ‘There’s enough for both of us. Help yourself’ he said, before snapping the door shut.

In the end, Ken’s relationship with Tess didn’t work out. But things didn’t really change. Tess was her usual bubbly self, and she was still close to Ken. They would talk together, laugh and touch; she would lean on him, hug his arm, giggle at him and make him smile. But she kept a distance she had not done before, and for that he was grateful.

Thank you Tess Ken said to himself in his mind. *Thank you for understanding.*

‘Are you ok Ken?’ Tess said to him. ‘You're daydreaming.’

Ken snapped back to attention. ‘What? Oh. I'm sorry.’

‘It’s ok’ she giggled at him. ‘Anyway, you’re supposed to have finished now. Hurry up and go home.’

‘Alright…sorry…’

‘See you next time!’ she sang happily to him as he took off his apron, hanging it up.

‘What happened to your lady friend?’

Ken suppressed a groan. He turned reluctantly to Mustang who had seemingly been waiting for him. He hadn't expected to be interrogated the instant he came home.

‘What do you mean?’

Mustang pushed himself off the wall, unfolding his arms and striding up to Ken.

‘You know’ he said to him. ‘You used to go on dates with her. I thought the two of you would get together. What happened?’

‘She’s nice’ Ken grumbled turning away and frowning, ‘…but she’s not right for me.’

‘Why?’

‘Because I like someone else.’

‘Who?’

Ken froze suddenly, catching himself.

‘I'm…’ he fumbled then, avoiding Mustang’s eyes then, shoulders hunched. ‘It’s…it’s none of your business.’

‘Oh my god.’

Ken glanced reluctantly towards Mustang again, meeting his gaze.

‘Oh my god’ Mustang said again.

Ken groaned, gritting his teeth.

‘What?’ he snapped irritant.

‘Oh my god’ Mustang said for the third time, taking a step closer to him.

‘What?!’ Ken snapped angrily now.

‘It’s me isn’t it? Isn't it? It is!’ Mustang said triumphantly at Ken’s reaction. ‘Yes! I knew you would come around.’

‘It’s not like that!’

Ken flinched as Mustang leant over him, hand resting on the wall behind him, their faces inches apart.

‘It’s ok’ Mustang spoke seductively, running a finger along Ken’s jaw line as he spoke. ‘I know now how you really feel about me. There’s no going back. I *will* make you mine. You will come over to my side. I’ll make it so.’

Yeah right Ken glared furiously back at Mustang, cheeks flushed. *In your dreams. I could never be with another man.*

‘I will make you mine’ Mustang said to him, moving away and turning, gliding away down the corridor with a backwards glance. He flashed him a grin, before disappearing into the next room.

Ken heard him chuckle quietly to himself as he went.

It was immediately after that, that the teasing and harassment began.

Chapter Seventeen

Every single day wherever Ken would go, Mustang would always be there, watching him, following him, making inappropriate jokes and passes at him at every opportunity, at school, at his job and when he was out with other friends. And Ken was losing his patience.

‘Don’t you have anything better to do?’ Ken snapped at him one day, dumping heavily on the table the seventh coffee Mustang had ordered. ‘Are you even drinking these?’

Mustang steepled his fingers, resting his chin on the back of his hands and leaning forwards with his elbows on the table, giving Ken a mischievous glance.

‘I'm just minding my own business’ Mustang said casually.

‘Couldn’t you mind your own business somewhere other than where I am?’

Mustang’s smile grew wider as he gazed up at Ken, and he winked at him slyly, but didn’t say another word.

Ken’s cheeks flushed with anger and he gritted his teeth, turning sharply and storming away to collect the next order. Not only did Ken have to put up with Mustang following him around every single hour of every single day, but at the end of every single day, after school or work had finished, Ken would return home to find Mustang waiting for him.

‘Welcome home!’ Mustang would declare happily, throwing his arms out wide. ‘It’s so wonderful to see you!’

‘I saw you ten minutes ago’ Ken replied flatly.

‘And here you are again’ Mustang sighed. ‘You just can’t stay away from me!’

Mustang would often in this time give Ken unhelpful advice and make comments that to Ken didn’t make sense.
‘Remember dweeb, the secret to happiness is learning how to move on.’
‘Live your life as you should, not how others want.’
‘If anything happened to me, what would you do?’
‘Ken…I love you….you know that don’t you?’
This continued for several days, until Mustang turned physical.

One day, Ken went out alone to study in the library, sitting on a comfortable sofa in a quiet corner. He had stayed here for quite some time, absorbed in his studies, when he was interrupted.
Ken ignored everyone else around him, focused only on his work. Occasionally a figure would walk past, but Ken would hardly notice them.
One of the figures sometime later moved by him then, but instead of walking past, he took a seat beside Ken.
Ken glanced up from his book, his expression turning instantly into a glower as he recognised the figure.
‘Mustang’ he said. ‘What are you doing here?’
Mustang turned to him, flashing his teeth in a grin, which only irritated Ken even more.
‘I'm here for the books.’
‘Liar’ Ken shot.
‘Alright you got me’ Mustang grinned. ‘I'm here for you actually.’
Ken gritted his teeth, glaring at his book, which he held tightly in both hands.
‘This is the quiet section of the library’ Mustang observed aloud. ‘Isn't it?’
‘Mmm.’
‘Like a library needs a quiet section. I thought the whole of a library was a quiet section.’
‘No’ Ken mumbled to his book. ‘Less people come to this section; this is where they keep rare book, the ones people read less often.’
‘I see.’
‘Hardly anyone ever comes to this part of the library’ Ken said casually.
‘Is that right?’ Mustang said. ‘So…we won’t be disturbed.’
Ken’s heart jolted.

He instantly tried to rise but Mustang stopped him, grabbing him by the arms and sitting on his lap facing him, pinning him down.

'Oh no you don't' Mustang told him. He smirked again. 'You practically ran into my trap…there's no escape now.'

Ken stared back at Mustang in shock, wide-eyed and heart hammering in his chest. He swallowed at the lump in his throat.

Mustang leant forward, resting his forehead against Ken's as he spoke.

'Are you going to call for help?' he asked him. 'There are people just on the other side of those bookshelves.' He sneered. 'But then what would they think if they saw us?'

'Don't…' Ken whispered. 'Please…'

'I've wanted you for ages' Mustang told him. 'I can't resist you any longer.'

Ken squeezed his eyes tight shut as Mustang leant forward, kissing him. He balled his fists, trying to lean away from him, but had nowhere to go.

Mustang moved back slightly, looking into Ken's face. He released one of his arms to stroke his face, his fingers coming to his lips.

'Open your mouth' he told Ken. When Ken didn't listen, he said, 'if you don't, I will have you. Right here and now.'

Ken opened his mouth, breathing in a deep breath. Mustang descended upon him again, kissing him deeply, slipping his tongue inside his mouth, tasting him. Savouring him.

After several seconds, Mustang drew back suddenly.

He got off him, rising to his feet and simply walking away as if nothing had happened.

He just left.

Ken remained where he was, leaning back on the sofa in shock. Cheeks flushed and heart pounding. The book he had been reading lay closed on the sofa beside him.

Ken exhaled deeply. For several moments he was unable to move, still shocked at what had happened.

And then he grabbed his book, leaving the library swiftly and running outside to find Mustang.

He was within sight of the front steps of the library, sitting on a bench in the park nearby.

Ken gritted his teeth, running over to him.

Mustang looked up curiously. It was clear from his expression that he had not expected to see Ken again anytime soon.

'What the hell what that?!' Ken demanded, throwing his book at his chest.

The book bounced off Mustang's chest and onto the floor.

Mustang stared at him with a bored expression, the lolly he was sucking in his mouth.
'What?' Mustang asked defensively.
'You know what!' Ken snapped angrily. 'Doing that to me! It's practically rape!'
He bit his tongue suddenly, realising he was shouting.
Several people nearby were glancing his way, casting him strange looks.
Ken stared at the ground angrily, cheeks flushed.
Mustang watched him for several seconds, before rising to his feet.
'I don't know what you're making such a fuss about' he told him casually. 'You looked like you enjoyed it to me.'
'I did not' Ken said through gritted teeth. 'There is no way I could…'
Mustang moved closer to him suddenly, taking the lolly from his mouth. 'You tell me you didn't enjoy it' he said, touching his groin, 'but your body says different.'
The touch was only brief, but Ken's pulse instantly quickened then.
'You want me' Mustang told him. 'You just don't want to admit it yet.'
He walked past him, slipping the lolly back in his mouth. He turned back to Ken, speaking to him one last time.
'I'll see you at home' he said, before moving away.
Ken glared after him; he could feel his blood pressure inside him swiftly rising.
That arrogant jerk. Who does he think he is? There is no way that I want him like that. No way. No way!
He turned on his heel and stormed off angrily, quickly picking up the book he had thrown before leaving, heading in the opposite direction to Mustang.
Dam him Ken thought. *Why does he have to toy with me like this? Why can't he just leave me alone? Why does he have to be the way he is?*

It was later that day when Ken when back to Mustang's apartment, that he found something interesting.
'Hey what's this?' he asked, picking up a framed picture from the side that had been lying face-down.
The picture was of a young man with short black hair.
'Wait…' Ken said staring at it hard, his brow furrowed. 'Is this…is this you?'
Mustang appeared from nowhere, swiping the picture from his hand.
'Don't touch my stuff!'
'Hey is that a picture of you when you were younger?' Ken laughed.

‘Yeah?’ Mustang said defensively, hugging the picture to him. ‘So?’

‘Aww you look so adorable’ Ken teased. ‘What went wrong?’

‘Hey’ Mustang said, ‘when you're as smoking hot as I am you don’t need to look cute.’

‘Yeah whatever’ Ken waved him away as he headed to another room. ‘I don’t care.’

Mustang hid the picture after that.

‘What are you getting so defensive for?’ Ken frowned at him.

‘I don’t like that picture’ Mustang huffed moodily. ‘I was different back then I was…’ he trailed of, but never finished his sentence.

Suddenly there came a knock at the door, and Mustang and Ken glanced around.

‘I’ll get it!’ Mustang sang, dancing across the room.

He opened the door, seeing standing there a slender young man dressed in tight leather and wearing heavy makeup.

Another one Ken thought without a care, quickly losing interest. *He has his own harem.*

‘Phoenix!’ Mustang cried, throwing himself into him. ‘You're here!’

‘I sure am’ the man grinned seductively, hands immediately travelling all over Mustang’s body, slipping beneath his belt.

‘Phoenix?’ Ken frowned, feeling a flicker of anger and jealousy as he watched the stranger fondle Mustang. ‘Is that really your name?’

The stranger looked past Mustang then, into the room and at Ken.

‘Oooohhh, who’s this? Is he your friend or plaything?’

‘He lives with me’ Mustang explained, running his fingers through Phoenix’s bright orange and yellow dyed hair.

‘Phoenix is my stage name’ the stranger told Ken in a seductive voice. ‘So Mustang’ he said to him again, ‘are you coming out with me?’

Mustang hesitated then, still hanging onto Phoenix.

‘I don’t…’ he began, ‘I don’t want to leave Ken…’

Ken gritted his teeth, glaring at Mustang. ‘Just go’ Ken said moodily. ‘I don’t care.’

‘Ken…’ Mustang uttered.

‘Just go’ Ken repeated, speaking louder now. ‘I don’t want you anyway.’

He stormed away then, going to his own room then and slamming the door behind him, standing in the dark and leaning back against the door, breathing heavily.

He felt so angry and upset, but didn’t know why. Part of the anger he felt was directed at himself.

What's wrong with me? Why do I feel this way?

He bowed his head, listening to the sounds outside the room.
He heard the sound of the front door closing, and then there was complete silence.
Ken let out a heavy sigh, straightening up.
He opened the door to the bedroom, allowing it to swing open.
He stood there, staring towards the front door Mustang, feeling suddenly so lonely.
I don't care he thought angrily to himself. *I don't need that jerk anyway.*
He turned sharply away, trying to find something to distract himself, he decided to watch some TV.

About an hour or so passed, and Ken was restless, unable to put Mustang from his mind, and feeling evermore angry with himself.
Ken turned the TV off, deciding suddenly to go look for him.
He ran from the apartment without even bothering to lock it.
He knew where Mustang would be, he knew the club he would be hanging out at tonight, and so headed there.
It was noisy and crowded outside. It took ages for Ken to get in, but after a long time of waiting impatiently in the line, he managed to get in.
Ken pushed through the crowd, searching for him; all the while the music was playing around them, far too loud.
Ken weaved his way around the dancing bodies, making his way forwards towards the stage.
When he finally reached it, standing at the front of the crowd, he looked up, seeing Mustang standing over him in the foreground of the stage. He began to sing.
Ken listened to his voice, so beautiful, so seductive…and teasing….
The others on the stage began to join in with him, as did many in the crowd.
As the chorus was sung again, the entire room sang along, jumping up and down. Ken was the only one who did not.
That was when Mustang noticed him. He sang, watching Ken as he did so, never breaking eye contact.
Ken's heart skipped a beat as Mustang sang; he lowered his microphone, watching Ken watching him.
Mustang wore black leather trousers low cut. His shirt was open, with only the bottom two buttons buttoned up. His eyes and lips were painted with makeup that was exaggerated and there was glitter smeared around his eyes and cheeks.

He reached a hand out to him, inviting Ken up to the stage. Ken's cheeks flushed and he shook his head furiously as the music beat around them.

As the men sang, those upon the stage danced, the lights flashing over them, changing different colours as they moved.

Mustang flicked his hair back playfully before speaking into the microphone again, continuing to sing.

The crowd cheered as the music continued, singing as one as one of the dancers moved closer towards Mustang, caressing him as he sung the next verse.

The music heightened, the entire room (save for Ken) danced and cheered and waved their drinks in the air. Some even had turned their attention onto each other. At a glance, Ken saw several couples kissing passionately on the edges of the dance floor and around the bar.

As Mustang continued to sing the next verse, the dancer close to him began to kiss him, slipping his hand onto Mustang's trousers, which he seemed to enjoy.

Mustang tossed the microphone away, grabbing the dancer nearest and kissing him then and there on the stage in front of everyone, causing many to cheer louder. The two took their positions around the other dancers, dancing with them in unison.

Ken watched as Mustang and this other strange man hung off each other, feeling a sudden sharp stab of anger and jealously.

That song ended, but immediately ran into another.

As the next song started up, Ken crawled up onto the stage quickly, grabbing Mustang by the sleeve and pulling him away sharply. Surprised by this, Mustang allowed himself to be dragged, before grasping Ken by the wrist suddenly and jerking him back.

Ken's eyes widened as Mustang pulled him into a kiss, arms wrapped around him.

Ken's heart knotted in his chest; horrified that Mustang had done such a thing in front of so many people. He broke away from him. Mustang ran with him then, pulling him off the stage and dragging him through the crowd.

They stepped out at last into the cool night outside the club. Ken immediately breathed a deep breath of fresh air, away from the many bodies that had surrounded him, now he felt free.

'Let's go somewhere more private' Mustang suggested not so casually, moving close as he did so, still holding him by the wrist.

Ken lent away from him as he did this, his heart skipping a beat. He felt suddenly flushed, despite and chilly nights breeze.

Mustang pulled him along, moving away from the club.

The two ran through the night, heading out of the town, only stopping when they reached a quiet park.

Mustang let go of him, the two breathing heavily as they caught their breath, fog appearing in the air before their mouths.

Mustang sat on the bench. Reluctantly, Ken followed suit, doing so a short distance from him.

Several minutes of silence stretched between them.

Ken was the first to break it.

'You can sing, you can dance, everyone loves you….' He began, turning to face him. 'Is there nothing you cannot do?'

'What was that?' Mustang asked him, leaning close with a hand behind his ear as if he struggled to hear him.

'What?' Ken asked defensively.

Mustang lowered his hand, grinning at him. 'You said everyone loves me.' He leaned closer to him, speaking seductively in a whisper now. 'Does that include you? Did you just admit that you love me?'

Ken went red then, eyes widening.

'N-no! I mean…I didn't say that!'

'It's alright' Mustang gleamed at him sitting back again. 'I still have time.' He threw a glance towards him. 'You've got a mark on you by the way' he said, tapping his own lip as he spoke to Ken.

'What?'

Ken rubbed the mark, seeing a red smudge of his fingers.

'You're wearing lipstick?'

'Yeah' Mustang smirked. He moved closer to him suddenly. 'I will make you say to me, *'I love you Mustang'*'. He told him. 'I will, if it's the last thing I do.'

Ken turned away from him, glaring at his own feet. 'Yeah right' he scoffed. 'Like I ever would.'

Ken felt his mood change within him, as he thought of Mustang kissing that other man, and then him.

'Why did you kiss me?' he asked his feet.

'Hm?' Mustang raised his head.

'Answer the question' Ken said to his feet.

'Because I love you.'

Ken's stomach turned over at that. 'B-but…you…how could you say that? You kissed that other guy?'

'Oh what?' Mustang said, in a tone that Ken did not like at all.

Ken suddenly saw his face, as Mustang leant forward, staring up at Ken.

'Are you saying…' Mustang began, 'that you're jealous?'

'No!' Ken snapped back, feeling suddenly awkward. 'I just….don't understand you.'

Mustang smirked again, before leaning back against the bench.

He lifted his head, breathing slowly as he experienced the sensations him, the light from the moon, the cool breeze, the smell of the town, the sounds in the distance of the nightclubs playing their music.

'Come on' Mustang said standing. 'We should go home.'

The moment Mustang closed the front door to the apartment, he turned on Ken.

Ken gasped as Mustang pushed him against the door, pressing his own body into his.

'What is up with you?' Mustang said absently. 'You've been acting really strange lately.'

'Mustang?' Ken began, unable to keep silent anymore; he blurted it all out, pouring his heart out. 'The truth is…that I have feelings for you…more than a friend.'

Mustang watched Ken closely, mouth half open in surprise, and brow slightly furrowed.

'Do you love me?' he asked Ken, his tone serious.

'N-no' Ken mumbled. 'I can't. I don't know you well enough yet, but…I want to….I…' Ken drew a deep breath, forcing out the next words. 'I want to be your boyfriend' he blurted. 'That is…' he added quietly, clenching his fists, '…if you want me.'

Mustang moved closer, leaning further into him.

'You don't need to be jealous' Mustang whispered into his ear, caressing him, running a hand up his throat, the other down his arm.

'I'm not jealous' Ken protested, as Mustang nibbled his ear.

'Yes you are.'

Mustang weaves his fingers with Ken's, pressing his body weight against his further, pinning him against the door.

Ken did not resist as Mustang kissed him, feeling his tongue inside him.

'I want you' Mustang breathed. 'And only you.'

'Mustang…'

He leant back, looking Ken in the face. 'I will show you' he said. 'I will show you that you are the only one for me.'

‘No’ Ken said leaning away from him. ‘I can’t…not when you’ve been with so many other…I just…can’t.’

Mustang’s expression dampened then, and he let go of him.

Ken felt strangely lost and lonely as Mustang left him.

Ken stayed in the main bedroom after that, sitting at the desk with his school books open before him.

The light to the bedroom was switched off; the only light came from the lamp upon the desk, and the hallway light which shone into the room through the open door.

As Ken sat there trying to work, he could hear Mustang running a shower, the muffled sound of his whistling could he heard through the door as he sang happily away.

Ken stared down at the book before him, tapping the nib of the pen rhythmically against the table as he thought.

He stopped suddenly, huffing and leaning back in his chair.

The door to the bathroom opened then, and Ken turned as he heard approaching footsteps, seeing Mustang standing in the doorway with a towel around his waist, another smaller towel he had used to dry his hair slung over his shoulder.

His breath caught in his throat as he saw him there, the light from the hallway shone brightly; lighting up his features, his red-dyed hair was wet, left to fall loosely about his shoulders.

‘Hey have you seen my hairdryer?’ Mustang asked him absently.

Ken didn’t answer as his eyes travelled down Mustang’s naked skin. He was so handsome, lean and muscular. The muscles on his arms, his shoulders….his stomach…

‘You're so beautiful…’

Ken blushed then, realising he had spoken out loud.

Mustang, who had been absentmindedly playing with a strand of his hair, turned to him suddenly, facing him properly.

‘What did you say?’

Ken turn away from him sharply, facing the desk again and leaning over his books.

‘N-nothing’ he mumbled, glaring at the page before him. ‘I didn’t say anything.’

His heartbeat began to quicken as he heard Mustang’s footsteps drawing closer to him. Mustang suddenly grabbed his chair, pulling him back and around so that he faced him.

Ken stared up wide-eyed at Mustang as he leant over him.

‘I heard what you said’ Mustang told him. ‘I heard it loud and clear.’

His eyes grew gentle as he caressed Ken’s face, running his fingers across his jaw line.

‘You want me’ Mustang said. ‘You want to have me. You want to feel me, taste me; feel me inside of you.’

Ken’s stomach flipped. His palms began to sweat, and his breath quickened.

Mustang’s finger came below his chin, and he tilted Ken’s head back.

‘I will have you’ Mustang told him. ‘I will give myself to you…if you want….’ His eyes grew hungry. ‘If you don’t want it…then tell me…and I will listen…’

Ken tried to speak, to say something. But he couldn’t. His breath was caught in his throat.

Mustang smiled at him then, reaching out to him, he grabbed Ken below the chin suddenly, leaning down and kissing him.

Ken’s nails dug into the wood of the chair as Mustang kissed him, his hands running over Ken’s body.

He grabbed Ken around the shoulders suddenly, pulling him up from the chair and back across the room. Mustang fell backwards onto the bed, still holding Ken. Ken gasped as he was pulled on top of him, leaning back away from him as Mustang’s hands moved down his body and to his waist. He grasped onto Ken’s hips, holding him in place as Ken rested upon him.

‘You want me?’ Mustang said to him. ‘Seduce me.’

Ken’s cheeks flushed at that, as Mustang waited expectantly.

‘W-what?’

‘You heard’ Mustang demanded. ‘You want to make love to me? Then seduce me.’

Ken hesitated, bowing his head slowly.

He reached a shaky hand towards Mustang weaving his fingers through his hair and pushing his red hair back.

Ken leant forwards over Mustang, kissing him on the lips, as Mustang, lying back relaxed on the bed, kissed him gently in return.

Ken moved his lips down his body, kissing his neck and shoulder, he squeezed Mustang’s strong arms, his hands shaking and sweating.

Mustang turned his head towards him, watching him closely as Ken hesitated.

‘I can’t do this’ Ken mumbled, backing off. ‘I…I don’t know how.’

Mustang sat up suddenly, grabbing Ken by the shoulder and rolling on top of him, bearing over him.

‘Then let me teach you’ Mustang said, leaning over Ken and unbuttoning his shirt one at a time. ‘And then you can do the things to me…that I'm about to do to you.’

‘How can you be so calm?’

‘I’ve had a lot of experience’ Mustang whispered seductively, taking his hand and kissing it. ‘I know what I'm doing.’

He ran his fingertip along Ken’s naked flesh, trailing it down his chest and to his navel and further. Ken suddenly grabbed his hand to stop him as he began to unzip his trousers.

‘I already gave you the chance to stop me’ Mustang said, pushing his hand away aggressively. ‘There’s no going back now’ he said.

Ken clutched at the sheets tightly, as Mustang began to caress him, touching him in a way he had never been touched before.

‘I-I’ve never done this before’ Ken said, ‘I…I've never…’

‘Has a woman ever touched you?’ Mustang asked in a murmur, moving off him as he pulled Ken’s trousers down.

‘No’ Ken whispered. ‘I mean…not like this.’ He stared up at the ceiling, as Mustang pulled his trousers over his ankles, throwing them off the bed to the floor.

‘Have you ever slept with a woman?’ Mustang said, licking Ken’s thigh.

‘No.’

‘Have you ever kissed a woman?’

‘Yes.’

‘Tell me’ Mustang murmured, holding Ken in his hand, nuzzling into him. ‘What have you done with a woman?’

‘I…’

‘How many girlfriends have you had?’

‘Only one…I mean…two….’

‘And?’ Mustang said. ‘How far have you gone with them?’

‘I’ve…’ Ken thought. ‘Kissed them, touched them…but…that’s it…’

‘I'm glad’ Mustang said. ‘Then I will be your first.’

Ken drew a sharp intake of breath, as Mustang placed his mouth around him.

‘What are you doing?’ Ken gasped.

Mustang paused, lifting his head up to Ken.

‘Pleasuring you’ Mustang said, rubbing his hand gently up him, moving his cheek against him. ‘You want it’ he said, placing his hand around him and moving his mouth over the tip. ‘There’s no point in denying. You're body tells me everything.’

His mouth moved over Ken, sucking him, feeling Ken’s touch deep at the back of his throat.

Ken threw his head back, moaning, his body trembling as Mustang moved his head vigorously back and forth.

‘Mustang’ he gasped, unable to hold himself. ‘I’m going to….’

‘Go’ Mustang’s muffled voice came from around him; he had paused only briefly to speak, before continuing.

Ken’s breath quickened rapidly as he climaxed, he held his breath for a moment, before letting out a deep sigh.

Mustang pushed himself up, his red hair falling over his face as he sat up.

He swallowed, and sighed, lifting his head up and smiling at Ken. He wiped his mouth lightly with the back of his hand, as Ken stared back at him.

‘How did that feel?’ Mustang asked him.

‘It felt…’ Ken uttered, ‘…good.’

Mustang reached towards him, stroking his cheek and running his fingers through his hair.

‘I'm not finished with you yet’ he said.

He grabbed Ken roughly by the shoulder and turned him over, holding him by the waist and lifting his rear end up. Ken tensed suddenly, positioned on his hands and knees.

‘No’ Ken gasped. ‘Don’t.’

‘There’s no going back now’ Mustang told him, reaching his hand around Ken’s body and caressing him between the legs.

‘I've never done this before’ Ken said to him. ‘I’m…I'm scared to…I….’

‘It’s alright’ Mustang said, pushing Ken’s front end down against the bed. ‘Just relax.’

Ken breathed slowly through his mouth, feeling a strange tingling in his chest, his stomach tightened.

‘You trust me don’t you?’ Mustang asked.

‘Yes’ Ken breathed.

‘Do you love me?’

Ken’s heart tightened in his chest, and his words were caught in his throat.

I can’t say it. I can’t say it out loud.

‘It’s ok’ Mustang told him, moving his hand around. ‘I still have time. I will make you say it…one day.’

Ken bowed his head, gritting his teeth.

‘It’s alright’ Mustang whispered to him. ‘I won’t hurt you. I’ll be gentle.’

He pushed himself forwards, Ken let out a whimper. Mustang hesitated, pausing for a moment, allowing Ken to relax, before pushing all the way in.

His rhythm was slow, was gentle, loving.

He held Ken, with one hand on his waist, the other on his shoulder, as he thrust into him.

Ken felt him as he pushed deep inside him, again and again.
Ken remained resting on his front, biting into his hand as Mustang had his way with him, taking his pleasure for several minutes.
He paused for a moment, speaking to Ken.
'Are you alright?'
'Yes' Ken whispered back.
'I'm going to come soon' he said. 'Can I finish you?' he asked. 'Can you handle it?'
A tear ran down Ken's cheek, and he gritted his teeth.
'Yes' he whispered again.
Mustang's hand ran down his body, he gripped Ken with both hands now around the waist, and thrust into him, this time harder.
Ken held onto the sheets as his pace quickened, Mustang let out moan, throwing his head back as he finished.
Ken let out a breath, as Mustang pulled out.

They lay side by side on the bed breathing heavily.
After a while, Mustang spoke.
'I hope I didn't hurt you.'
'No' Ken mumbled. 'You're fine.'
'It felt good' Mustang smiled, 'to have you at last. I've wanted this moment…for the longest time.'
'You could have any man you want' Ken told him. 'Why did you want me so bad?'
'It's because I could have any man I want' Mustang said, 'that I wanted you so badly. Because you resisted me.'
Ken turned his head towards him, lying on his back as he watched Mustang.
Mustang smirked at him, leaning over him and kissing him.
'I love you Ken' Mustang said.
'You shouldn't say that' Ken mumbled.
'Why not? Its true isn't it?'
'You shouldn't say something so sincere so quickly.'
'Why not?' Mustang protested. 'None of us know how much time we've got left on this earth. If you died tomorrow, then I'd be glad I told you how I feel, before I lost you.'
'Why are you so serious all of a sudden?'
'It's just the truth' Mustang said. 'I love you; I have done for a long time.'

Ken turned to face away from him, but Mustang leant over him then, turning Ken's head back towards him.

They shared a kiss, before relaxing on the bed again.

Ken lay there for several minutes beside Mustang in silence, when he next spoke his name, Mustang didn't answer.

He's sleeping Ken realised as he looked over at Mustang, seeing him lying still with his eyes closed and breathing slowly.

He shut his eyes too, and was asleep in minutes, feeling exhausted.

Chapter Eighteen

Ken woke the next morning, seeing the light shining through the thin curtains pulled across the window, brightening the room within. Beside him, Mustang was still fast asleep, seemingly not to have moved from the same position all night as he lay there naked on his back.

Ken turned over, propping himself up on an elbow.

'Hey' he whispered shaking Mustang awake. 'It's morning.'

Mustang opened his eyes, blinking wearily for only a moment, before sitting bolt-upright and rolling on top of Ken, pushing him back onto the bed, suddenly wide away.

'Let me suck your cock.'

'What?!'

'Come on' Mustang urged, as Ken tried to fend him off. 'I want to.'

'Now?' Ken asked tentatively.

'I want us to be familiar with each other' Mustang told him. 'I want to suck your cock.'

Ken groaned in resignation.

'Fine' he said.

Mustang wasted no time and immediately bowed his head, grasping Ken tightly as he wrapped an arm around his leg.

Ken flinched as Mustang began to work, doing so vigorously.

Ken came moments later, and Mustang drew back coughing into his hand. He cleared his throat, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand and looking up at Ken with a smile.

'Are you ready for breakfast now?' he asked Ken.

‘I wish we could stay together forever’ Mustang said later as he cooked for the two of them, egg in bread.

‘Why couldn’t we?’ Ken asked him, sitting at the table and waiting for his breakfast. ‘Are you planning to kick me out?’

‘Of course not’ Mustang said indignantly, dishing up the food. ‘No it’s not that. You might get bored of me and move on.’

‘How can I get bored of you?’ Ken asked him. ‘You keep me on my toes…to say the least.’

‘Here’ he said, shoving the plate before Ken, who stared down at it. ‘Look, it’s like we were last night.’

‘What?’

‘Me’ Mustang pointed to the egg in the bread, ‘inside of you’ he said, pointing at the bread.

‘That was a terrible joke.’

‘You loved it.’

Mustang pulled his chair as close to Ken’s as he possibly could.

‘Give me some space’ Ken protested leaning away from him.

‘But I want to be close to you’ Mustang sang happily.

Ken grumbled as he cut up his breakfast.

‘How can you be so open’ Ken asked him.

‘What do you mean?’

‘You…love to easily.’

‘I only love you.’

‘You say that’ Ken said to his toast, ‘but you’ve been with so many men…even before I met you.’

‘Is that what this is about?’ Mustang asked him. ‘You're jealous?’

‘Are you in a relationship with Justin?’

‘No. I mean…’ Mustang shrugged. ‘It’s just physical. But I don’t need him anymore, because I have you.’

Ken’s cheeks flushed then.

‘Tell you what’ Mustang said, ‘I’ll break it off with him. You can come with me. Just to see.’

‘And the club?’

‘I won’t go there anymore’ Mustang said. ‘If that’s what you want.’

‘It’s not that…it’s just…’ he grimaced, forcing himself to speak the next sentence. ‘I don’t want anyone else touching you.’

Mustang stared at him in wide eyed surprise; then he broke into a smile.
'Are you getting possessive?'
'No' Ken glared.
'Is this one step for you saying to me that you love me?'
'No way.'
'Alright' Mustang said, hugging onto Ken's arms tightly and kissing him on the cheek. 'From now on, I will give myself to you, and only you. Just to show you how much I love you, that I really do love you.'
Yeah right.
'Fine' Ken grumbled, continuing to eat. 'I believe you.'
They ate breakfast silently from then on until they had finished. Mustang cleared away the dishes; then sat at the table again. He leant on his elbows; then placed his hands down, sliding across the table and closer to Ken, who drew away from him.
'There's no school today' Mustang said. 'What do you want to do?'
Ken lifted his eyes to him.

A moment later, and they were sitting together peacefully on the grass, Mustang lying back with his arms folded behind his head and one foot propped against a knee. Beside him Ken sat up with an elbow resting on his knee, leaning forwards as he watched the world.
Around them the gravestones sat silently, and butterflies drifted in the breeze.
'Remind me again' Ken began, 'why did we come here?'
Mustang opened his eyes.
'You couldn't make your mind up' he said, 'and so I decided for you where we should go and what we should do.'
'But we're not doing anything' Ken said.
'Does that bother you?'
Ken turned to him, seeing Mustang watching him closely.
Mustang sat up, reaching out to Ken and grabbing him by the front of his shirt, pulling him down on top of him.
'No' Ken said quickly. 'Not outside.'
'Why not?' Mustang said teasingly, reaching forward and nuzzling into his neck as he spoke, holding onto Ken's shirt tightly as he lay on his back.
Ken suppressed a shudder and a moan as Mustang began to kiss him.
'Someone might see us' Ken said.

‘So?’ Mustang said. ‘Let them watch.’

‘We’re in a graveyard’ Ken said.

‘A place of peace’ Mustang replied to him. ‘Any other objections?’

Ken hesitated.

Mustang took this opportunity to push Ken gently back to the ground.

He leant over him, kissing him deeply.

Ken felt a shiver down his body, feeling his heart quicken in his chest.

‘I'm still so new to this’ he whispered to Mustang. ‘I…I don’t know what to do…’

Mustang leant back, smiling warmly.

‘Do whatever you feel is right’ Mustang said to him. ‘Follow your instincts…follow your heart…and if you are not sure…I will guide you…’

Mustang lifted his hand, caressing Ken’s cheek tenderly.

‘This all feels so strange’ Ken mumbled.

‘It will’ Mustang said, ‘for a while…’

He smiled again, before reaching forwards and kissing him again.

‘Ken’ he whispered to him, leaning back so that he could look into his face, ‘I love you…’

Ken blinked up at him, the bright blue sky shining above them.

‘How can you say that?’ Ken said to him. ‘I haven’t known you long.’

Mustang took Ken’s hand in his own, holding it to his face.

‘I really do love you’ Mustang told him. ‘I don’t want to be with another man ever again.’

‘But why?’ Ken asked him, gazing up at him. ‘Why do you care so much about me?’

‘Because you're honest’ Mustang said, brushing his hair back tenderly. ‘Of all the people I have known…’ Mustang said to him, ‘you are the only true friend I have ever had.’

Ken’s heart skipped a beat.

‘I have loved you’ Mustang said, ‘for a long time, but I've been wanting something more from you.’

‘Well now you’ve got it.’

The edges of Mustang’s eyes crinkled.

‘I cannot tell you’ he began, ‘how truly happy that makes me.’

Ken sat up suddenly, kissing him back.

‘I'm glad you chose to be with me’ Mustang said to him. ‘Live your life as you should, not how others want.’

‘What are you talking about?’ Ken asked, hugging him around the neck.

Mustang regarded Ken then with a level expression.

‘Ken…I wanted to tell you something before…’ he broke off, smiling suddenly. ‘My real name…’ he said, ‘…its Alphonse.’

Ken released him, sitting back on the grass.

‘Hu?’

‘The name my parents gave me’ Mustang smiled.

‘It’s a nice name’ Ken answered softly. ‘I'm surprised you don’t use it.’ He paused, suddenly realising something. ‘I'm surprised you’ve mentioned your parents. It’s weird I haven’t met them yet…are they….I mean…do they know you're…you know…?’

‘Gay?’ Mustang smirked. ‘Yes. They know I am gay.’

‘And they're ok with that?’

Mustang tilted his head slightly. ‘Yes’ he nodded. ‘They accept me the way that I am’ he said.

‘Then how come I haven’t met them yet?’

Mustang hesitated, smiling again at Ken, though this time his smile was weak.

‘You will meet them soon’ Mustang told him. ‘I promise.’

‘I'm looking forward to it’ Ken said. ‘I really am.’

‘Ken…’ Mustang said to him. ‘I want to…….make love to you….again tonight.’ He raised his head. ‘If you will have me.’

‘Of course’ Ken said hastily. ‘It felt…good last time’ he finished awkwardly, blushing slightly as he hugged his knees to his chest.

‘I know it feels strange to you…all of this…’ Mustang told him. ‘You’ll get used to it. I did.’

Ken raised his head. ‘What were you like when you were young?’

‘A little shy’ Mustang admitted with a grin. ‘I know it’s hard to believe.’

Ken smirked at him.

‘Alright’ Ken said. ‘You told me something about you. Now I think I should tell you something about me.’

‘And what is that?’ Mustang said teasingly.

‘The real reason my parents kicked me out…’ Ken began nervously, ‘is because I told them I was in love with another man…….in love with you…’

Ken raised his head slowly, meeting Mustang’s gaze, who stared back at him in surprise.

That night, Mustang and Ken went into the master bedroom together.

‘So’ Mustang said, pushing Ken gently down onto the bed and slowly unbuttoning his shirt for him, ‘how do you want to do this?’

Ken sat on the edge of the bed, staring nervously up at Mustang.

‘I don’t know’ he mumbled. ‘I've never…I mean…this is only my second time…’

Mustang smirked, leaning over him. He pushed him onto his back.

Ken stared up at Mustang, his heart quickening in his chest.

Mustang took Ken’s hand in his own, kissing his palm tenderly.

‘Are you nervous?’

‘A little…’

Mustang smiled gently, nuzzling into his hand. He held Ken’s hand in both of his own.

‘Did it feel good last time?’ Mustang asked him. ‘Was I good to you?’

‘Yes’ Ken said, ‘…you were good to me…’

He drew a slow breath then as Mustang leant over him, holding Ken’s arms down as he kissing him deeply.

Ken moaned, feeling Mustang’s tongue inside him. Mustang’s hand moved down Ken’s arms, his hand weaving with his.

Mustang moved back slightly, opening Ken’s shirt to expose his chest. Mustang bowed his head, running his tongue over Ken’s chest.

Ken shivered.

‘Wait’ Ken whispered, as Mustang slipped his hand beneath Ken’s belt.

Mustang paused, drawing back.

‘What's wrong?’

‘I want to…I mean…’

‘Go on’ Mustang encouraged. ‘What is it?’

‘You made me feel so good last time’ Ken uttered, ‘…I want to make you feel the same way…’

Mustang stared at him for several seconds, then he smiled.

‘Hm’ he bowed his head, taking a step back, ‘let me help you.’

Mustang moved away from him, taking his shirt and trousers off and stripping completely naked. Ken flushed as he stared at Mustang who stood before him grinning slyly.

Ken’s eyes travelled down Mustang’s body, lingering around the middle, before reaching his feet and travelling up again.

‘Well?’ Mustang grinned, ‘I'm offering myself to you.’ His eyes sparkled with excitement as he held his arms out, presenting himself. ‘I am at your mercy, what would you like to do to me?’

Ken closed his mouth, swallowing the lump in his throat.

Mustang sneered at him, taking a step closer. Ken flinched then, but Mustang didn’t touch him, instead moved past and crawling up onto the bed, lying back against the headboard and spreading his legs.

Ken turned to face him, watching him closely.

Mustang said nothing, instead closed his eyes, sighing heavily and leaning his head back against the pillows.

Ken took a steady breath to calm his nerves, sitting there with his shirt unbuttoned.

He leant forward, crawling up the bed and leaning over Mustang.

Mustang opened his eyes a crack, tilting his head and opening his mouth as Ken kissed him, feeling Ken touch his cheek tenderly.

Ken moved down, biting Mustang’s throat gently, then moving down to his chest, feeling his rib cage, before moving further down still, grasping his belly firmly with his nails.

Mustang smiled, shifting slightly where he lay, and letting out a long low moan. Between his legs he throbbed, growing larger.

Ken lifted Mustang’s leg up, grasping him and licking up his thigh, moving closer to between his legs.

Mustang groaned again, turning his head to the side and squeezing his eyes tight shut as Ken licked him.

Mustang raised his head, looking straight at Ken now. He parted his legs further, hissing at Ken through his teeth.

‘Go on…’ he said. ‘*Do it…*’

Ken hesitated, his face between his legs.

Ken lowered his head, opening his mouth wider, saliva running from his lips.

Mustang tilted his head back as Ken closed around him, moaning deeply as he felt only sensation in one part of him.

‘More’ he begged, ‘…more…’

He grabbed Ken roughly by the hair with one hand, helping him as he moved his head up and down.

‘Keep going’ Mustang gasped. ‘Don’t stop…’

Mustang’s breath began to quicken, and he began to gasp as he came closer.

Ken stopped suddenly, pulling sharply back and coughing all over the sheets, spitting and wiping his mouth.

'You could have given me warning' Ken muttered, rubbing his lips clean.

'Sorry' Mustang grinned awkwardly. 'It just sort of happened…you know?'

Ken glowered at him angrily.

'Hey' Mustang said to him. 'You finished me. Now it's your turn.'

He turned around, facing away from Ken as he rested on all fours.

'I want you to jam your thing in here' he said to Ken, touching himself.

'W-what?'

'I want you to do me' Mustang breathed seductively, 'as hard and fast as you can, I want you to be as savage and rough with me as you want, I want you to finish that way…even if I beg you to stop.'

'I don't want to hurt you' Ken worried.

'But Ken' Mustang said turning back to face him, 'pain is part of the pleasure. Go on, don't be shy.'

Ken gritted his teeth, shuffling forwards on his knees and holding onto Mustang's waist as he directing himself in.

'That's it' Mustang breathed, as Ken pushed himself forwards, 'that's…ah…'

Ken pulled back again, before thrusting forwards more forcefully, causing Mustang to groan through gritted teeth.

Ken fucked him hard, taking his pleasure, finally finishing when he was ready.

Ken let out a deep breath before pulling out. He relaxed his body, falling forwards and lying on top of Mustang, breathing heavily as he rested against his skin, Mustang's sweat mingled with his own. He felt Mustang's hot flushed body beneath his.

Mustang shifted slightly, turning his head to the side and resting with his cheek against the pillow.

'How was that?' Ken asked him nervously. 'Did that feel good?'

Mustang turned over then onto his back so that he faced Ken, arms reaching up to grab him.

He pulled Ken down into a kiss, reaching far into him. Ken moaned as he kissed him back, their bodies wrapped up in each others.

Mustang pulled back, breathing a heavy sigh.

'It felt so good' Mustang grinned, running his hand down Ken's back. 'I'm so happy to have you at last…I…' his eyes began to shimmer then, and for an instant, Ken was sure he saw tears in Mustang's eyes. 'I love you so much Ken.'

‘….Mustang…’
‘Shhh’ he said to Ken. ‘I want to do it again.’
‘Now?’ Ken said nervously raising an eyebrow, ‘but we just….’
‘I have a lot of stamina’ Mustang gleamed. ‘Now turn around.’

They fell asleep late that night, and woke up late the next morning. Well…Ken woke up late, Mustang woke up early, and as soon as the sun touched the horizon he did everything in his power to make sure that Ken was awake too.
First he went to the shop (which always opened early) and bought 58 packs of eggs, 16 bags of flour and enough milk to fill the fridge, came home, and proceeded to a make over 300 pancakes in an attempt to in entice Ken out of bed with the delicious smell that wafted through the apartment.
When that didn’t work, he crawled under the bed and began to hum very loudly.
When that didn’t work, he proceeded to sing Lady Gaga’s poker face while poking his face.
Ken frowned angrily in his sleep, turning over and pulling the sheets up to cover him better.
Mustang then went away.
He was gone for about twenty minutes, before returning and shaking the bottom of the bed, shouting that the building was on fire.
When that didn’t work, he took the bag of marbles he had placed in the freezer earlier that morning and let them loose in the bed, in the sheets and all around Ken, shaking the bed and shouting this time that the illuminati were coming for them.
When *that* didn’t work, he decided to vacuum the bed.
‘Get off!’ was the angry reaction he got from Ken.
Satisfied that his efforts seemed to be working (slowly) Mustang went away again.
He was gone for an entire hour, before returning again.
This time, Ken was abruptly woken up. And it was a shock what he found in the room.
Mustang had gone to the farm on the edge of the town and spoken to a good friend of his, asking for a very peculiar favour, his friend (the son of the man who owned the farm and a former lover) agreed to help Mustang.
Ken was woken by the sound of a male peacock, which for those who are familiar with the sound, is quite an alarming thing to be woken by.
Ken sat bolt-upright in bed, staring in disbelief at the room around him.

The moment he was awake, Mustang and his friend and former lover who were standing at the bottom of his bed, threw armfuls of ducks at Ken. The ducks slightly alarmed quaked and stumbled over the sheets, waddling over the bed in confusion.

'….what the hell?!!!'

'Morning!' Mustang waved merrily at him. 'It's good to see you're awake.'

'What the fuck is going on?!'

It was very rare for Ken to swear, but it seemed, this bizarre occasion called for it.

Within the modest-sized master bedroom, besides himself, Mustang, and a man that Ken did not know, were an assortment of birds that certainly did not belong in such an environment.

There were seven peacocks, six ducks and twelve chickens and five geese. Not to mention the turkeys and guinea fowl.

Needless to say, it was very crowded in the room.

'What the hell is the matter with you?' Ken demanded of Mustang.

'You know' Mustang grinned, 'you're a really heavy sleeper.'

'So this is your boyfriend' the man Ken did not know spoke up, looking at Ken closely.

'Yup' Mustang grinned happily turning to him. 'I love him.'

'Who's this?' Ken demanded.

'He's my old boyfriend. I used to love him. Now he's just a friend.'

'You'd better help me get these birds back to the farm before my dad gets back' the old boyfriend now just a friend said to Mustang. 'It's lucky I know your odd ways. My father would be less than understanding.'

'Of course' Mustang beamed. 'Ken and I would be happy to help.'

'Thanks for forcibly volunteering me' Ken told him flatly. 'I haven't even had breakfast yet.'

'Well maybe' Mustang gleamed at him, 'you should have gotten up earlier.'

Ken glowered.

It took over twenty minutes to get the birds back into the friend's van. When it was done Ken stood beside Mustang who waved at his friend from the doorway of the apartment as he drove away.

'I'm hungry' Ken grumbled.

'We have some pancakes inside' Mustang informed him.

'I thought you gave them all to your friend to feed to his pigs.'

'Don't be silly' Mustang giggled childishly. 'I kept some for you of course. Now come on' he said, putting his arm around Ken and walking with him, 'let's go back inside.'

Mustang watched as Ken ate his cold breakfast. Just as Ken got up to clear his plate away, Mustang's hand shot out.

'You're not getting away from me…' Mustang spoke in a deadly voice that came across as more comedic than anything else.

'Hu?' Ken said in confusion.

'Get on that table.'

'What?'

'I want to fuck you!' Mustang said, grabbing Ken's arms and pinning them to his side, shaking him as he spoke.

'Again?' Ken moaned. 'Don't you have an off switch?'

'No.' Mustang answered shortly. 'I'm always horny.'

Ken's shoulders slumped and he let out a sigh, a bored expression crossing his face. 'Fine' he said, 'just let me clear…'

But Mustang didn't let him finish his sentence. He knocked Ken's plate to the floor where it broke, and shoved him forwards over the table.

Ken drew a sharp intake of breath as Mustang's hand wound around his waist, quickly unbuttoning his trousers and pulling them down, before going to his own.

Ken relaxed his body, resting on his front upon the table, moaning as Mustang slipped his fingers into him, playing with him. His breath began to quicken as Mustang worked.

'Slow down' Ken said through gritted teeth, squeezing his eyes shut. 'I'm still sore from last night.'

'Oh don't worry' Mustang spoke almost cruelly as he pulled his fingers out, hand going to himself. 'You'll get used to it.'

He pushed himself into Ken, doing so slowly. Ken whimpered in pain as Mustang forced himself forwards.

Once Mustang was in, his hands went to hold Ken, one hand upon his shoulder, the other on his waist. Mustang pulled back slowly, before pushing forwards again. He slowly worked up a rhythm, quickening his pace and then slowing it down again, savouring the moment, making it last as long as possible until he could no longer hold himself. He came inside Ken, breathing heavily and letting out one long sigh as Ken on the table gritted his teeth, blinking back tears.

Mustang sighed again, leaning forwards upon Ken, pinning him to the table.

His hands weaved with Ken's, his touch gentle now. He reached around to kiss Ken, slipping his tongue into his mouth. He whispered into Ken's ear.

‘I love you Ken…I love you…’

‘I love you too’ Ken uttered.

Mustang sighed one last time, his body relaxed against Ken’s. He leant back, pulling out of Ken and freeing him.

Ken straightened, standing up again as Mustang adjusted himself.

Shortly after that, Mustang fell asleep on the bed in the master bedroom. Ken found him here, moving onto the bed and lying down. Mustang shifted, feeling Ken lying beside him, he placed his arm over Ken’s body, kissing his shoulders and the back of his neck before becoming still again.

Ken’s grip tightened once on Mustang’s arm, before relaxing again. He fell asleep; the two holding each other close as they rested on the bed.

They woke up later that day. It was the afternoon.

Chapter Nineteen

‘What a wonderful day it is today!’ Mustang declared merrily as he sauntered down the street in front of Ken.

Ken glanced around him in displeasure, grimacing at the sun that was lowering in the sky, beginning its descent towards the horizon.

‘Ug’ he said with a frown. ‘It’s so late…’

‘Don’t be silly’ Mustang gleamed back at him. ‘This is the best part of the day.’

Ken slowed to a stop, giving Mustang a sceptical look.

‘Where are we going anyway?’ he asked him, ‘don’t tell me it’s the graveyard. I don’t want to go there.’

Mustang faltered then, turning back to face Ken.

‘Let’s go somewhere nice’ Ken said, ‘somewhere that’s not so depressing and creepy.’

‘Oh’ Mustang tutted, putting his hand on his hip and rolling his eyes. ‘It is not depressing and creepy…’

‘Uh-hu’ Ken replied flatly.

‘Alright’ Mustang said, raising his hand and running his fingers through his hair, ‘let’s go out for a coffee…like a date.’

‘A date?’ Ken blinked.

‘Yeah. You know what one of those is don’t you? You’ve been on them before when you were with…’ he broke off, realising Ken was giving him a pissed-off look. ‘Before…’ Mustang changed tact. ‘Before I turned you to the dark side’ he finished.

‘Hm.’

‘Come on’ Mustang sang happily, taking Ken by the hand and pulling him the other way.

‘H-hey’ Ken said, staring down in alarm and trying to tug his hand free. ‘What are you doing?’

‘Now don’t tell me you're shy’ Mustang frowned playfully back at him, ‘not after last night…and this morning…and all the things I plan to do to you tomorrow and the day after that and next week….’

‘Keep your voice down’ Ken hissed, grabbing Mustang’s wrist with his other hand and trying to pry his fingers open. ‘Not out in public.’

‘Not what?’ Mustang said, keeping a firm grip.

Ken paused, glancing up at Mustang.

‘You're afraid of what people might think’ Mustang spoke slowly as the realisation came over him. And then he smiled. ‘Don’t worry’ he grinned, ‘most people aren’t as old fashioned and narrow minded as you used to be.’

‘What?’

‘Here’ Mustang said, letting go of his hand and moving closer to him, cupping his face as he did so. ‘Let me show you.’

Mustang pushed him back against the wall, kissing him and running his hands over Ken’s body. Ken, nervous and a little uncertain at first eventually relented, allowing Mustang to do what he wanted with him, balling his fists and trying not to moan as Mustang’s wandering hand moved to touch his crotch.

A moment later, Mustang backed away.

‘There’ he smiled in satisfaction. ‘Now tell me you don’t feel naughty’ he giggled.

They went for a coffee after that, Mustang insisting they walk down the street holding hands. Ken agreed only reluctantly to this, holding Mustang by the hand, unable to free himself from his vice-like grip.

It was only a short time later that Mustang began to skip, drawing even more attention to them, and declaring to several passersby that he was gay, and in a relationship with the man he held hands with, and that they often had raw and rough sex on a regular basis.

Ken could only burry his face in his free hand, going beetroot red and wishing the ground would swallow him up.

They reached the coffee house.

‘So um…’ Ken began uncertainly after they had gotten their drinks and chosen a table, ‘are we like…in a relationship now?’

‘Hm?’ Mustang said, broken from his distraction as he had been seductively licking his spoon and never breaking eye contact with Ken. ‘Yeah’ he said. ‘Of course we are!’ he paused, putting his spoon down. ‘You're alright with that aren’t you? I mean…you love me don’t you? Because I love you.’

Ken flinched at that, glancing up at Mustang shyly.

‘Has anyone ever given you any problems about being gay?’

‘Sure they have’ Mustang said distractedly, stirring his coffee, adding more sugar and stirring it again. ‘But you know what?’ he said lifting his eyes to Ken’s. ‘You don’t listen to them. No matter what you do in life, there will always be someone out there who will judge and criticize you for it. But you don’t listen to them. You live your own life as you should, not how others want. Follow that rule, and you will be happy.’ He paused to take a sip from his cup. ‘Anyone who has anything negative to say about me, can stick their head in a bucket of ice-water.’ He paused again. ‘Why should I care what they think?’

‘You're very wise’ Ken answered meekly. ‘There was a time I would constantly worry about what people thought of me, and I would always live how I thought others would want me to.’

‘And now?’

‘Now?’ Ken mumbled. ‘Now things are different, I feel even that I am a becoming little bit like you…a little…’

‘And are you happier now?’

Ken held his cup with both his hands, staring down at the steamy content.

‘Yes’ he said at last, speaking slowly. ‘I didn’t realise it before but…my life back then….’ His eyes grew sad. ‘It wasn’t what I wanted…I realise that now…I only wish…’

He broke off.

‘You miss your family’ Mustang voice.

Ken nodded silently.

‘I know how you feel’ he grumbled.

Ken raised his head.

‘Why don’t you see your family?’ he asked.

‘I don’t want to talk about it’ Mustang spoke in a tone that surprised Ken. ‘You will find out someday.’

Mustang was serious, whatever he was hiding.

Ken felt suddenly a little uncomfortable at his tone, knowing he had struck a nerve. He distracted himself, bowing his head as he lifted his cup, taking a tentative sip.

The couple watched in silence as the people move back and forth along the street beyond the window. Inside the coffee house itself, it was a gentle atmosphere.

It was a peaceful afternoon, and the sky outside was beautiful.

They left the coffee house when they had finished their drinks.

‘Where are you going this time?’ Ken complained a short while later when Mustang began to wander off, heading in the direction of a bus stop.

‘Oh’ he said nonchalantly, ‘did I forget to tell you?’

‘Tell me what?’

Mustang hesitated, Ken got the impression that he wanted to say something, but was reluctant to say it.

‘What is it?’ Ken prompted.

‘I have to do something.’

‘What?’

Mustang bit his tongue, his expression turning serious.

‘What have you done?’ Ken asked, becoming immediately suspicious.

Mustang’s expression broke into a smile, but it was not the sly one he so often wore, it was sincere.

‘There is something I have to do’ Mustang said to him, speaking softly. ‘Please’ he said. ‘Let me do this.’

Something in his voice make Ken back down, and he felt something strange stir inside him.

‘What are you doing?’ he asked.

‘I’ll tell you later’ Mustang said turning away from him. ‘I promise.’

Ken submitted.

‘Ok’ he said. ‘But where are you going?’

‘I just need to catch a bus’ Mustang spoke moving forwards again towards the bus stop, though not looking at him. ‘Please’ he added, as Ken made to speak again, made to go after him. ‘Don’t ask me any more questions.’

‘Mustang is something wrong?’ Ken was unable to stop himself.

Mustang paused, turning back to Ken with a frown.

‘S-sorry’ Ken fumbled. ‘That just came out…pretend I didn’t say it.’

Mustang faced ahead again.

‘I just need to wait here for a moment’ he spoke softly. ‘The bus will be here soon.’

About five minutes or so later, it came.

‘Mustang?’ Ken said tentatively, watching as Mustang boarded the bus.

Mustang turned back to him with a smile, stepping back off the bus and leaning forward to give him a kiss. Ken felt Mustang’s soft lips against his own.

‘I’ll come back’ Mustang said. ‘Ok? Just go home for now…’

He retreated, speaking briefly to the bus driver.

Ken took a step back uncertainly, feeling strange inside.

What the hell is going on? Is this one of his eccentric behaviours? Ken thought. *No….this is different…*

The doors of the bus closed, and Ken watched as Mustang sat in one of the seats with his chin resting in his palm. But he was not looking at Ken, instead staring down at his lap.

‘Mustang?’ Ken uttered.

What's wrong?

The bus hissed and the engine roared as the large vehicle began to pull away slowly.

Ken did not take his eyes away from Mustang. But Mustang would not look at him, would not raise his head.

The bus drove away, and Ken stood there on the pavement, feeling lost and alone.

Why has he left me? Why is he acting so strange? What is he not telling me…?

The day was growing later. Ken went home alone that evening, and waited.

The apartment seemed somehow barren without Mustang there. In the short time that Ken had known him he had become used to Mustang’s antics, and to suddenly have him absent…

‘I feel lost…’ Ken realised with shock. ‘I never realised I felt this way until he was gone….’

He lay on the sofa, resting back with an arm behind his head, staring at the clock on the wall.

He felt groggy, and tired.

It was boring in the apartment now, and as time began to tick on, Ken began to slowly drift off to sleep.

Chapter Twenty

Ken woke up at around midnight, shocked at the time.
He sat up on the sofa quickly.
'Mustang?'
He rose to his feet and quickly searched the apartment, calling out for him.
'Mustang!'
But it became clear very quickly that he was not here.
Ken pulled his mobile out, dialling his number. He put the phone to his ear.
And then he heard a ring.
Ken turned around, seeing Mustang's mobile vibrating on the kitchen table.
He had left it behind.
Ken hung up, placing the phone back in his pocket.
He stood there, wondering what to do, glancing at the clock again.
Maybe he's out drunk again Ken thought. *It wouldn't be the first time.*
He put his shoes on, leaving the apartment and jogging through the town in the middle of the night.

He searched for hours, checking the graveyard three times before coming home again, thinking that perhaps, Mustang would have returned in that time.
But when he stepped through the door, he saw that Mustang was not there.
Whatever Ken thought, *he'll probably be back in the morning.*
Ken felt exhausted, and despite his worry, he decided to go back to sleep.
Ken went to bed, falling asleep after only several hours of restlessness, his mind slowly began to dream.
When he woke next, it was nine o'clock in the morning, and Mustang was still not home.
It was at this point, when Ken began to search the streets again, this time asking people, whoever he came across, if they had seen him. The man with red hair. Many knew him in the town because of his eccentric tendencies. But no one Ken had come across had seen him.
Ken was becoming increasingly worried now. He didn't eat that day, and the feeling of sickness and worry was growing inside him with every passing minute.

Mustang did not appear that day, or the entire day after that.
The day after that, Ken contacted the police.
They came to the apartment and interviewed Ken, who at that point was unable hold back his emotions anymore.

He broke down, crying and shaking in front of the two policemen who tried to comfort him.

Hours later on that same day, there came a knock on the door.
Ken who had been pacing the apartment for hours froze suddenly, filled suddenly with dread, and fearing the worst.
He hurried to the front door, opening and gasping in shock.
Mustang stood before him.
'I'm sorry' Mustang whispered. 'I didn't just want to walk in. I thought I might scare you.'
Ken glared at him, tears in his eyes.
He slapped him, Mustang caught by surprise, stumbled to the side.
'You've been gone for days!' Ken shouted, his voice breaking. 'Where did you go?'
Mustang turned back to face him, his cheek red.
'Where did you go?!' Ken demanded. 'Where did you go?!'
'I can't tell you' Mustang spoke flatly, his voice void of emotion.
Ken became angry.
'How could you do this to me?! I called the police!'
'Ken I'm sorry' Mustang spoke quickly, becoming upset himself now.
'How could you do this?!'
'Ken….' Mustang uttered, tears streaming down his face now. '…please…'
'Get in.'
Mustang stepped over the threshold and Ken slammed the door, rounding on him.
'I think you've got some fucking explaining to do' he hissed at Mustang. 'I am *absolutely furious* with you. Do you have any idea what I've been through?'
Mustang buried his face in his hands and began to cry.
'What are you doing?!' Ken shouted at him, angry and confused. 'Why are you crying?'
'I'm sorry…' Mustang began to sob. 'Ken I….I'm so sorry…'
He seemed genuinely distressed and upset.
Ken relented.
'I'll make some tea' he spoke quietly. 'Why don't you sit in the living room, I need to make a call…let the police know you've come home so they'll stop looking for you.'
Mustang moved away silently as Ken went into the other room.

When he returned to the living room a short while later with a tray of tea, he found Mustang sitting upon the sofa with his head in his hands, leaning forwards with his elbows on his knees.

Ken put the tray down worriedly, staring at Mustang closely.

He was still crying, the way he breathed…the way his shoulders shuddered.

Ken blinked back tears in his own eyes, reaching out to Mustang. He touched his shoulder.

Mustang glanced up suddenly, his eyes bloodshot red and skin blotched.

His hair which was almost always spiked at the top and tied back in a ponytail now hung limp and greasy to his skull. His clothes were old and his hands dirty.

'What's happened?' Ken said quickly. 'You're scaring me.'

Mustang began to tremble, his face contorting in grieve. He bowed his head again, crying. Tears dripped from his eyes onto his jeans.

Ken knelt before him, hugging him around the middle. Mustang held him tightly back.

They stayed there for the longest time.

Many hours later, about one a clock in the morning, the two were still awake.

Ken sat on the floor, leaning back against the sofa, while Mustang sat on the sofa itself, having not moved since he first came home.

The tea on the tray before them was untouched and stone cold, and neither of them had eaten.

It was the longest time, and neither of them had spoken.

Finally, Mustang broke the silence.

'I think we should stop seeing each other.'

Ken felt like he had been stabbed through the heart.

'What?' he gasped rising to his feet and turning to him. 'How could you say that?'

Mustang bowed his head.

Ken felt as if his world had just turned upside-down. He suddenly felt like he wasn't in his own body anymore, but watching the scene from a distance.

'Was it something I did?' Ken began to cry openly. 'I'm sorry…please…tell me what's going….you're killing me….I can't take this!'

'It wasn't anything you did!' Mustang answered quickly back. 'I promise.'

'Then why are you doing this? I love you. Don't you feel the same anymore?'

'I do…'

Ken gritted his teeth, balling his shaking fists.
‘What is the matter with you?! Why are you doing this? Why are you acting this way?!’
‘Ken please….’ Mustang said in a husky voice.
‘Tell me…’ Ken said as tears ran down his cheeks. ‘What happened? What's gotten into you? Why are you acting this way?’
Mustang clenched his jaw, staring hard at Ken, seemingly unable to answer.
‘I love you’ Ken said firmly, grabbing his face with both his hands and lifting his head. ‘I love you…please don’t leave me.’
Mustang began to tremble again.
Ken held him close, hugging him, holding his head to his chest.
‘I love you’ Ken said to him, ‘I love you.’
‘I love you too’ Mustang whispered. ‘More than anything…’
Ken bowed his head, his arms as he held Mustang shaking slightly.
‘I don’t know what you're going through’ Ken whispered, leaning back so that he could look into Mustang’s face, ‘but whatever it is…I will be here for you…no matter what. I will support you. I love you Mustang. I love you.’
‘I love you too’ Mustang said, ‘I don’t want to leave you….I don’t.’
Ken smiled weakly.
‘I'm sorry’ Mustang spoke quietly, his voice sounding regular now. ‘I've just…there’s stuff going on right now. But don’t worry’ he added quickly, ‘everything will be ok in the end. I promise…I promise I will tell you everything when it’s all over. I just…can’t right now.’
‘I'm sorry if I did anything to upset you’ Ken said.
‘No’ Mustang said, rubbing his eyes dry. ‘It wasn’t you.’ He glanced up at Ken again, smiling. ‘I think we should go to bed’ he told him. ‘It’s late.’

They shared the bed that night, Mustang lying behind Ken, holding him close.
‘I love you’ Mustang said to Ken one last time. ‘Never forget that.’
Ken let out a deep breath, his body relaxing, as he succumbed to sleep, feeling happy now that Mustang had returned, though there was still worry etched in his mind.

When Ken woke early the next morning, he found that Mustang was gone again, but this time, there was a note left for Ken on the kitchen table.

Chapter Twenty One

Ken turned over in bed, waking quickly with alarm to find that he lay there alone.

‘Mustang?!’

He got up, but was met with only silence, finding a note on the kitchen table.

Ken picked it up and read.

Morning Ken.

I'm sorry to leave you like this, I've gone to see my family

Love Mustang

Ken turned the paper over, but it said no more. He glanced up, seeing with mild irritation that Mustang’s mobile had been placed on the counter beside the note.

Ken gritted his teeth in annoyance. It seemed that Mustang wished not to be contacted.

At least I know where he is Ken thought. And then he realised he had no idea where Mustang’s family lived.

Ken cursed under his breath, and began to search the apartment.

It wasn’t long before he found in one of the draws an envelope addressed to him.

Ken opened it, brow furrowed in uncertainty, and gasped at what he found inside.

There was a fat wad of cash inside the envelope, with a yellow sticky note stuck to the front.

Ken’s money

He counted the money. There was six grand there.

'What the hell is going on?' Ken spoke aloud, feeling a growing sensation of worry. 'What is he *doing*?'

He glanced past the envelope, and saw inside the draw was another piece of paper.

He closed the envelope again, putting it aside, and picked up the paper. It was a letter. Ken began to read.

Dear Alphonse

I hope you're well, we all miss you very much. I've just got a new job at the bakery, it's really hard work but everyone is really nice and I'm learning how to make all sorts of delicious things.

If you ever come back to us, I would like to make something nice for you, and you can tell me honestly what you think.

(Please be honest, if you don't like it or it's too sweet, I want to know, otherwise I'll never learn)

Dad just finished building the pond in the garden. It looks beautiful, I know you would love it. Although knowing you, you would probably try to swim in it or something. It's not that big I'm afraid, it's only little. But dad is talking about buying some little goldfish for the pond. I think it would look really nice. You're free to come and see it when it's finished, or even when it's not. You know you're free to come home any time you like, even if its in the middle of the night. We all miss you.

Mum's doing great too, we went out shopping together last week and I convinced her to buy a onesi, its so cute I got one myself too and now we match. You should get one too, I know you wouldn't mind, and we can

pressure dad into getting one as well then we would all match…or would that be weird? Anyway, I know you wouldn't mind.

I hope you're looking after yourself and not doing anything dangerous. Dad put some more money in your account the other day, so you can spend it on more hair stuff like dye and the stuff that makes it go spiky. Have you gone back to red? I know it's your favourite colour, but I like it best when it was blue, mum likes it best yellow.

Why don't you come home and show us your new hairstyle? I'm sure it would surprise us…or not, I think no matter how crazy it is we'd be used to it. You are so funny after all.

Its mum's birthday soon, and we would like to see you and have the family together for it.

PLEASE come home, we don't care what's going on, we just miss you and want to see you.

We hope your last test went well and the results were better.

Please write to us back, at least once. Please.

We all love and miss you very much, and hope you are getting better (please tell us what's going on, I know you don't want to worry us but we are worrying more by not knowing)

Please contact us, even if it's just a letter, even if it's just a few words. We all get excited when the postman comes by in case there is anything from you. Stop being so stubborn and write to us, or even better, call, or even better still, you could actually come and visit us. It's not like you go to school properly or anything. Surprise us. You know where we live, or have you forgotten?

I don't care what your stupid reasons are, we all love you, and I will tell you so in every letter.

Mum and dad are telling me to write saying that they love you and miss you and want to see you. We all miss you very much, no matter what we want to see you.

Take it easy, and keep smiling
And please write back, I'm getting tired of being disappointed every morning when there is no letter. I know its obsessive, but I sit by the door every morning and wait in case there is anything from you.
(I do wish you would stop being so stubborn. It's really annoying)

Lots and lots of love

Xxxxxx Elaine, mum and dad xxxxxxx

(PS write to us or visit xxx)
(PPS we all miss you)
(PPS stop being a stubborn ass xxx)

Ken blinked slowly, reading again the part of the letter that worried him the most

We hope your last test went well and the results were better.
Please write to us back, at least once. Please.
We all love and miss you very much, and hope you are getting better (please tell us what's going on, I know you don't want to worry us but we are worrying more by not knowing)

Results were better…?

Ken glanced up, furrowing his brow.

What the hell is going on? What hasn't he told me?

And then he looked at the date on the letter, realising with shock that it was dated four years ago.

…Mustang…

He glanced at the address.

51 farefield lane

Doven Gates

Cansted

Ken folded the letter up, putting it in his pocket, strengthening his resolve.

He would go to find Mustang himself.

He searched the apartment until he found a small wheelie suitcase, faded and dusty. Putting all of his meagre belongings inside and closing it, he took the money, heading to the door of the apartment.

He paused on the threshold, standing with his hand on the doorknob and staring back into the apartment.

Ken didn't know why, but he had the feeling he would not be returning.

He bowed his head, closing the door slowly and leaving the complex, he made his way to the train station.

Chapter Twenty Two

The town he came to was beautiful. Ken watched the scenery pass him through the window on the train, pressing his forehead against the glass, his eyes glazed over as he saw the world go by. He couldn't stop thinking about Mustang.

…I hope he's alright…

It was many hours later when the train reached the station. Ken felt a twinge of nervousness in his stomach, clenching his fists and rubbing his palms on his jeans. He sat up, glancing about at the other people around him, the compartment was nearly empty. Ken grabbed his bags, leaving the train quickly and stepping out onto the platform.

He turned, facing one way as the wind blew his hair back. Around him on the platform people wandered to and fro, Ken saw a family moving away together, couples here and there, single people like him, young students, older people, a man sitting on a bench with a scruffy dog by his side.

Ken faced ahead, walking forwards, pulling with him the wheelie suitcase, which contained everything he owned.

He left the station, stepping out onto the street beyond, feeling lost and alone.

For many minutes he stood there, wondering what to do and where to go, he listened to the noise around him, the people, the traffic, he decided to ask a stranger.

'Excuse me' he said to a woman who was walking by him.

'Yes?' she asked him briskly.

'Is there a graveyard in this town?'

'What?' the woman frowned. 'Yeah, there's just one, it's on the other side of town, you might need to catch a bus.'

'Can you give me directions please?' Ken asked.

Ken hastily wrote these down, thanking her before the two went their separate ways.

He found the bus stop and waited. He waited, unable to shake the feeling of nervousness and uncertainty that had gripped his heart.

It felt like ages before the bus arrived, but at long last he saw the right one coming his way as he waited at the stop, seeing the number displayed at the front alongside the destination. He consulted his note before looking up again.

The bus screeched to a stop, its brakes hissing loudly as the doors opened.

Ken let the other people move ahead of him, paying for their ticket and taking a seat on the bus before following after them. He told the bus driver his destination, got a ticket, then sat nervously at the back, fiddling with the zip of his suitcase and gritting his teeth.

The bus set into motion and Ken bowed his head, waiting to arrive at his stop

What am I going to do when I get there? Just wait? What if he doesn't arrive? What if he's not there?

Ken pulled out the letter from his pocket again, reading it for the thousandth time.

Mustang… he thought with anguish to himself. *Why did you leave me like this?*

He straightened slightly, glancing to a young man sitting on the back seat of the bus on the opposite side.

'Excuse me.'

The man glanced around, pulling out his earphones and looking at him.

'Is there a place to stay in this town?' Ken asked him, 'like a bed and breakfast or something?'

'There's several hotels' the man offered. 'Where are you heading?'

Ken told him the route and which stop he would be getting off at.

'Once you get off' the man told him, 'keep following the main road, you'll see several sign posts for different hotels.'

'Thanks' Ken nodded.

The stranger smiled at him, turning away and putting the earphones back it.

Ken looked away, back out the window at the beautiful town they travelled through.

He felt sick.

Chapter Twenty Three

Ken got off quickly when the bus had reached his stop. The doors closed behind him and the bus drove away.

Ken glanced about him at the new environment, he wasn't familiar with any of it. He had never been to this town before, and it was all so strange and new to him.

Behind him the road was fairly quiet, and he saw on the post beside the bus stop, a sign pointing towards the cemetery. It was directly before him.

Ken drew a slow and steady breath, calmly his nerves. He stepped off the main path, heading down the narrower one towards the grassy hill, following a winding trail through an archway and between the trees. It seemed he was in some sort of park, a family was there, their

children playing, groups of friends walking paths that branched off from the one Ken walked, several people walking their dogs.

Ken faced ahead again.

He walked for many minutes, passing a college through the carpark at the entrance before stepping onto grass again.

He paused, looking up.

He had reached it. Here he saw a traditional stone church, the entire building was shaped like a cross, and its stained glass set into the walls all around was beautiful.

There were many graves here, and the grounds were beautifully kept, the flowers before the stones fresh, the grass kept short, and the gravel path that led to the church was free from weeds.

As Ken passed through the iron gates that were held open, he saw a picnic table off to one side, upon its surface were pots of flowers, 'free to good homes' said the sign.

Ken passed this, pulling the suitcase with him along the gravel path was difficult, and so he left it under the picnic table, hidden from view. He continued on without it.

Ken glanced about him at the graves as he went, seeing the names upon them, the words of comfort carved into the stone. There was a child's grave here, little cherubs upon the small headstone, before which were some cuddly toys, damp and a little dirty from the last time it had rained.

And another grave, the grave of a woman it seemed who had died recently. The flowers were fresh, the picture of her young, perhaps the same age as Ken, maybe even younger.

'Too young' Ken mumbled sadly, '…too young…'

He faced ahead again, and continued walking.

It was a beautiful place, so silent, so still, so sad.

Ken wandered the stone path around the grounds, stepping off occasionally to look at some of the graves themselves. There was no one in the cemetery besides himself, and so he went back to his bag, sitting on the picnic bench beside the flowers, waiting.

He only saw one other person there that day, a young woman about his age. She brought flowers to a grave; white trumpet shaped flowers, and stayed for a time before leaving. Ken could see the tears in her eyes. She glanced at him only briefly, before her eyes dropped to the floor again. She did not speak to him.

And then everything became quiet again. Ken sat there alone. He breathed a heavy sigh, looking up to the sky.

The world was growing dark.

Ken sighed again, bowing his head.
He rose, walking out of the cemetery with his suitcase and back down the path he had come, reaching the main road again, and looking for a hotel to stay in.
I'll use the money Mustang gave me.

Chapter Twenty Four

Ken returned to the cemetery the next day, and the day after that, and the one after that. For days he returned to this place, the grounds of the church, quiet and peaceful they were. He would leave to find a place to eat, but would always return. Hours every day Ken would spend here, just waiting, and watching.
He would at times wander between the graves simply looking at them, always glancing about him in case he saw a figure with fiery red hair.

Then one day, he saw something

Ken was passing a grave, when something made him stop.

The name on the head stone read: Alphonse Peterson
He looked to the ground before it, and saw a picture of a young man with short black hair.
It was Mustang.

Ken experienced the sensation of his heart slowly dropping in his body, sinking into an abyss, its beat stopped altogether. His breath caught in his throat, and he began to tremble violently, fear and panic clawing its way into him.
He fumbled for his pocket, pulling out the letter and opening it with shaking hands.
He read the first words.

'*Oh god*….' Ken whimpered, as the horror and realisation slowly dawned on him. 'No….no….'

His legs felt like they had turned to water, and he sunk to his knees before the grave, falling forwards on his elbows and scrunching the letter in his hand.

He began to sob hysterically, pawing at the ground beneath him, smelling the scent of the grass as he gasped.

He sat back on his heels, staring at the grave before him, at the picture that was rested against the stone.

He was a few years younger; his hair was much shorter and had not been dyed red, instead was its natural black. But there was no mistaking it.

It was him.

'Oh god no…' Ken whispered, 'this can't be happening….this can't be real……*Mustang……..'*

He bowed his head, shoulders quivering as fresh tears spilled down his cheeks.

His raised his hand to cover his eyes, crying quietly now.

After a time, he drew a shuddering breath, lowering his hand. His heart jolted in his chest, as he suddenly realised something.

'Please' Ken whispered, his body shaking. 'Please don't do this…'

Mustang grabbed him suddenly, but not in the same way as he had before. He embraced him now, Ken's eyes wide with shock as he felt Mustang's body wracked with sobs as he held him.

Ken glanced around then.

Mustang looked up at him, eyes wide and shining.

'Please help me!' Mustang said. 'I'm so scared!'

'He knew…' Ken whispered in horror. 'He knew he was going to die.'

Suddenly it all made sense, the way he spoke, the way he acted, his reckless behaviour.

He didn't care about his future, because he knew he didn't have one.

The muscle around Ken's eyes twitched, and his face contorted in grief. He bowed his head again, balling his fists full of grass.

'It's not fair……it's so unfair……'

He lifted the letter scrunched up his hand, unfolding it slowly. He struggled to read the letter through his tears, reading it slowly.

PLEASE come home, we don't care what's going on, we just miss you and want to see you.

We hope your last test went well and the results were better.

We hope your last test went well and the results were better.

Ken read this part again and again.

Results……what was wrong…?

He slumped his shoulders, letting his hand drop to his side again, the letter held loosely in his grasp.

He stayed here for a long time, absorbed in his own thoughts. He did not notice the figure approach him, until he saw the shadow.

Ken looked up, glancing around to the figure beside him.

It was a young woman, perhaps a few years younger than him. He suddenly recognised her as the woman he saw before in the cemetery, the one that had laid flowers upon the grave, this grave.

'Hey' she spoke quietly to him, smiling sadly. 'You must be Ken.'

Ken stared up at her, blinking his tears away.

'……Elaine?'

Chapter Twenty Five

Ken and Elaine walked together through the town, away from the graveyard.

'I live not too far away' Elaine said glancing sideways to him, 'I hope you don't mind the walk.'

‘No’ Ken mumbled, ‘its fine…’

Elaine watched him, her gaze lingering on him for a few moments, before turning away.

They walked in silence, moving slowly through the town.

Eventually they came to an estate; it was quiet and pleasant, away from the main part of the town. In the distance down one road, some young children played games with a ball, cars were parked in driveways, and the roads were silent.

It was evening, and the sky above was beginning to dim.

‘Where have you been staying?’ Elaine asked.

‘In a hotel near here’ Ken answered meekly.

Elaine was silent for a moment.

‘I think you should stay with us’ she said to him. ‘My parents would want you to.’

Ken said nothing as they continued to walk on.

They headed towards one of the houses, Elaine opened the door, and Ken followed after her.

‘Mum! Dad?’

Two figures appeared from the kitchen then.

‘Hey honey, you're back.’

Elaine smiled at her parents, her father watched silently.

‘This is Ken’ Elaine indicated, ‘Mustang’s boyfriend.’

‘Oh no’ Ken said hastily, ‘I'm not…’

‘It’s ok’ Elaine told him quickly. ‘We all knew he was gay, and we accepted him.’ She smiled weakly at Ken. ‘He’s told us everything about you, everything, since he first showed interest in you.’

Ken stared at her, lost for words.

‘We all loved Alphonse’ Elanie smiled, tears running down her cheeks. ‘We all miss him very much.’

She stepped forwards then, embracing tightly, Ken felt her shoulders wrack with sobs.

‘I'm so glad to meet you at last.’

‘He had a brain tumour’ Elaine was saying. ‘He was first diagnosed many years ago, after that…he did everything he could to keep a distance from us.’

Ken glanced up at Elaine from across the kitchen table, Elaine’s mother had made them both cups of tea, which sat there before each of them untouched.

‘Why?’ Ken asked. ‘Why would Mustang do that?’

Elaine raised her head to him, sorrow in her eyes.

‘The doctor only gave him a few years to live’ Elaine said, ‘he…began to distance himself from us, so that it wouldn’t be so difficult when the time came…for him to die.’

Elaine’s eyes grew distant.

‘He was here just a few days ago’ Elaine told him. ‘We all said goodbye to him one last time.’ She looked away from him then, turning to gaze out the window. ‘He died right there’ she told him, ‘by the pond. He was very sick…in the last few days.’

It seemed she was about to say more, but then she stopped.

‘What are you going to do now?’ Elaine asked him suddenly.

‘I…I don’t know’ Ken mumbled. He bit his lip, drawing a slow breath, before continuing. ‘I…I thought I was happy in life, I had a family I thought cared for me, a girlfriend……’ he broke off then, falling silent for a time before continuing. ‘When I first met him’ Ken went on, ‘I thought he was the most irritating person in the world…’ Ken looked down at his hands. ‘He changed my life…he made me realise….’ He swallowed the lump in his throat. ‘I was living the life my family wanted me to live…not the life I wanted…when I told my family…that I…’

Elaine tilted her head at him.

‘That you had feelings for my brother?’

Ken glanced up, meeting her gaze.

‘I had feelings for him’ Ken admitted, ‘long before I admitted it to him…long before I admitted it to myself. But my family…’ his lip trembled then, as he struggled to maintain control. ‘They could not accept the way I was…they could not….’ He drew another breath. ‘I told them I was having feeling for another man…than I did not love my girlfriend anymore……they threw me out. Mustang took me in…gave me a home.’ A tear trickled down his cheek. ‘He asked for nothing in return.’

‘He always had a tender heart.’

‘I…’ Ken said, ‘my school year is coming to an end. My friends are all going to go their separate ways.’ He paused. ‘My family have disowned me……I…have nowhere else to go…nothing else to do…’ Ken went silent for a moment. ‘I never realised…’ he said, ‘…how much I depended on him…he gave me a home…he cared for me…Mustang…’ Ken’s eyes were out of focus as he stared at his cup of tea before him, ‘he was always so kind’ Ken whispered, ‘…I can’t believe he’s really gone……’

‘I loved my brother’ Elaine said, ‘more than anything else in the world.’ She paused. ‘But…I will remember him, as I knew and loved him…how we used to play as children…how he used to make me laugh, the silly antics he used to get up to…he was truly a wild spirit.’ She smiled, but this time the smile was genuine, it reached her eyes. ‘Alphonse was the greatest thing I've ever had……but it was time to let him go.’

Shortly after Elaine took Ken upstairs.

‘This was his room’ she said to him, ‘he hasn’t stayed here for years…except…a few days ago…’ she trailed off, and Ken took a step forwards into the room, taking in the environment. It was a large room, but bare, there was little within except furniture.

‘We would like you to stay here’ Elaine said to him.

‘Oh’ Ken shook his head. ‘I can’t’.’

‘Please’ Elaine interrupted. ‘His last wish was that we give you this room, for as long as you want it.’

Ken blinked several times at her, his breath caught in his throat.

‘It was his last wish?’ Ken uttered.

‘Yes’ Elaine smiled. ‘He wanted you taken care of.’

Ken gritted his teeth, forcing himself not to sob.

‘He…said that……even though he was….’

‘Yes’ Elaine said. ‘He loved you. One of the last things he said was spoken out of concern for you.’

She smiled.

‘We would be happy if you stayed here, we all would. You meant a lot to him…and so you mean a lot to us….to me and my family…’

Ken stepped further into the room, moving towards a small stack of books upon the shelf in the corner.

‘I want a new start’ Ken was saying, opening a book at random without looking at the title. ‘I want to get away from my old life and start a fresh one.’

His eyes scanned over the page of the book briefly before closing it and putting it back on the shelf.

'I want to change my name' Ken said, 'I want to change my look…I want to change everything.'

Elaine tilted her head at him, but she said nothing.

'I want to change my name' Ken said again, '…to Leroy…'

Elaine glanced at the book he had put down, before looking back at him again.

'Alright' she mumbled, 'if that's what you want…*Leroy*.'

'I will accept your offer' he said, bowing his head. 'My name is now Leroy, and I shall make it official.' He turned to face her. 'I will get my stuff from the hotel, it's not much.'

'Alright' Elaine said. 'I'll just tell mum and dad…they'll both be thrilled to hear that you're staying.'

She went away then, and Ken stayed alone in the room.

It was so quiet, so empty.

Ken went over to the bed, lying down on it and staring up at the ceiling.

He rolled over onto his front, balling the sheets up in his fists. He took a deep breath, and smelt Mustang's scent in the covers. It still smelled like him.

'Oh Mustang…' Ken whimpered, burying his face in the sheets and crying silently. 'I'm sorry…'

That night, while Elaine and her parents were preparing dinner, Leroy went upstairs alone. He went into the bathroom, staring at his own reflection.

'I want to change' he said to himself. 'I want to look different.'

He glanced down, seeing hair clipper on the side.

He reached out to take it, staring down as he held it in his hand.

He looked up at himself in the mirror, turning the clippers on, and lifting it to the side of his head.

When he came downstairs a short while later, Elaine and her parents all glanced around at him, surprised by the change.

He had shaved the sides of his head, brushing his hair back at the top, a lot like the way Mustang used to with his hair, only without the dye or ponytail.

They only smiled at him without question, inviting him to sit at the table. The meal was nearly ready.

‘We’re so glad to have you here’ Elaine’s mother said to him. ‘We’re so grateful you decided to stay.’

‘Thanks’ Leroy mumbled at her. ‘I just…thank you for letting me stay’ he finished shortly.

‘It’s our pleasure’ she answered with a smile. ‘You can stay here, for as long as you want.’

Part 2

Three years later

Chapter Twenty Six

‘Alright, no problem, thanks for calling.’

Leroy disconnected the call, taking his head phones off with a heavy sigh and leaning back in his chair.

‘Everything alright?’ his friend Stan asked beside him.

‘Yeah’ Leroy grumbled, reaching forwards and turning his computer off.

‘Are you finished now?’

‘Yeah’ Leroy said again checking his watch. ‘I'm already late.’ He ran his fingers through his hair, pushing the chair back and grabbing his bag and coat.

‘I’ll see you tomorrow then’ Stan called out to him as Leroy slumped away, head hung.

‘Yeah’ Leroy said again wearily back to him. ‘Bye.’

‘See you Leroy’ his friend Rose said to him as he went by, giving him another of her sly grins.

‘Yeah’ Leroy mumbled, ‘see you.’

He walked away from her, wishing not to have to deal with her right now. He knew she liked him, but he had never once given her something to grasp onto, having previously made his thoughts clear to her. But she still carried on.

Leroy walked out of the office, heading towards the elevator. He waited quietly as a few other people got into the lift with him, standing patiently as he listened to the hushed muttering of voices in the office before him, the rustle of clothes, footsteps.

The doors to the lift closed, and they descended through the building.

Leroy glanced through the glass walls of the elevator to the car park outside, it was mostly empty now, and the day was beginning to darken as the sun touched the horizon beyond the trees at the edge of the car park.

The lift came to the ground floor and Leroy stepped out, shuffling along the corridor heading to the main doors.

'Hey Leroy!'

He glanced around with tired eyes.

'Phil…what is it?'

'Hey how're you doing?' Phil smiled.

'Fine I guess.'

'I was just wondering if you wanted to come out with me and some of the guys.'

'Drinking?' Leroy asked in a monotone. 'No thanks.'

Phil frowned at him in annoyance. 'You're going to that graveyard again aren't you?'

Leroy turned around.

'I don't mean to pry but…isn't it time you moved on now?'

Leroy didn't say anything, instead continued to stare at the ground behind him.

After a few seconds of silence, Phil spoke.

'Whatever, I don't mean to upset you, I know it's not my business……sorry.'

'It doesn't matter' Leroy muttered, turning away. 'I'll see you tomorrow ok?'

'Sure' Phil said behind him, 'see you.'

Leroy left the building without talking to anyone else, walking quietly and keeping his head down.

The town at this time of day was quiet, the traffic on the roads light, and that was the way Leroy liked it. No one else spoke to him as he made his way. He stopped at the edge of the pavement, glancing both ways down the road before crossing it briskly, heading up the hill through the park, and towards the cemetery.

There was no one else around.

Leroy stood before Mustang's grave silently, just standing there, staring down at it.

He came here often, even after all this time. Things had never been the same since that day he had learned of what had happened. It ran through his mind none stop. He couldn't stop thinking of how Mustang must have felt.

He must have been so afraid all the time Leroy thought not for the first time. *He was carrying this weight alone…he never told anyone…only his family knew.* Leroy lowered his eyes. *Would I have treated him differently had I known?*

He thought he was alone in the cemetery, but then he heard a sound, a commotion of some sort.

He looked around, seeing two figures a short distance away. They appeared to be fighting.

Leroy watched them.

Their discussion was getting heated. The taller of the two grabbed the other figure by the arm.

Leroy moved over to them.

'Hey!' he called out when he reached them. 'What's going on? You want a fight, have it somewhere else.'

The taller figure let go of the other figure, rounding on him.

'Who are you? Mind your own business.'

Leroy glanced to the shorter figure, a young man with short wavy white-blonde hair and blue eyes. He was clearly frightened, a sensitive character, with a 'soft' look about him.

Leroy took a closer look at him, seeing a dark mark around one of his eyes, a bruise.

Leroy stared at the younger figure for a moment, before turning back to the taller one.

'Did you hit him?'

The younger figure's eyes widened at this, and he glanced nervously towards the taller one.

'Mind your own business!'

Leroy grabbed the man by the shirt, shoving him back against a tree, their faces inches apart.

'I'm happy to fight you' he told the man calmly. 'You want to fight me here and now? I'll beat you to a bloody pulp.'

'I'd like to see you try mate' the man sneered.

Leroy drew his fist back, punching the man hard in the gut, acting fast before giving the other man a chance to hit him first. The man doubled over as Leroy lifted his knee, driving it hard into the man's nose.

The man stumbled, hands to his face where blood was already seeping between his fingers.

‘I'm not afraid to fight’ Leroy told him. ‘You hit someone else be prepared to be hit yourself.’
The man glared at him, pure hatred in his eyes. His glance flickered to the younger man, who tensed then, taking a step back to stand behind Leroy.
‘I won’t forget’ the man said, before turning on his heel and storming away, hand still covering his face.
Leroy let out a heavy sigh, and beside him the boy seemed to relax.
‘Are you alright?’ Leroy asked him.
‘Yes’ the young man answered. ‘Thank you for sticking up for me.’
Leroy’s gaze lingered on him for a moment, before looking back in the direction the taller figure had gone.
Ken walked away.
‘Hey wait where are you going?’ the boy called after him.
‘Home.’
The young man hesitated, before running after him.
‘I'm Sam by the way.’
‘Leroy.’
‘That’s a cool name.’
Leroy gave him an irritated glance, before facing ahead again, not speaking.
‘So um…thanks for helping me.’
‘You said that already.’
‘Yeah I did’ Sam laughed sheepishly, scratching the back of his head. ‘It’s lucky you were here really.’
‘I guess.’ Leroy glanced down at him. ‘Why was he bothering you anyway…wait no’ he corrected himself hastily. ‘Sorry I shouldn’t be asking, it’s none of my business.’
‘He’s my boyfriend’ Sam volunteered. ‘But…well things aren’t going that well.’
‘I can tell’ Leroy answered flatly. ‘Just leave him.’
‘I'm trying but he won’t take no for answer.’
Leroy paused then, blinking as he finally processed what he said. He turned to Sam.
‘Boyfriend?’
‘Yeah’ Sam gleamed. ‘I'm gay. You don’t…have a problem with that do you?’
‘No’ Leroy said shortly. ‘Even if I did why would it bother you?’
‘It wouldn’t’ Sam beamed. ‘It’s just….some people…well…they don’t like it…you know?’
Leroy stared at him, mouth half open. He looked over Sam’s shoulder then.
‘What's that?!’

‘What?’ Sam said excitedly turning around.

Leroy ran away.

‘Hey wait!’

Sam made after him.

‘Stop following me!’ Leroy snapped.

‘I don’t want to annoy you…’ Sam began.

‘Than stop following me.’

‘I just wanted to thank you again. It was really brave what you did, standing up to him like that. He can get really nasty at times.’ Sam’s grin widened. ‘You're like a super hero! Stepping into save me like that.’

‘Oh give me a break’ Leroy groaned.

‘So why are you here in a cemetery anyway?’ Sam asked glancing about them, struggling to keep up with Leory’s wide and hurried steps. ‘Were you visiting someone?’

‘Look kid’ Leroy said coming to an abrupt stop and rounding on him. ‘Just leave me alone alright?’

Sam stared at him in shock. Then his expression soured.

‘I'm not a kid’ he answered indignantly.

Leroy glowered at him. He turned and marched away. This time, Sam stayed where he was, watching Leroy as he went.

When Leroy got home, Elaine was waiting in the kitchen to welcome him back.

‘Oh Leroy’ she said with a grin, ‘there you are. I’m sorry we’ve already finished eating.’

‘It’s alright’ Leroy mumbled, taking his shoes off in the hallway and putting his coat and bag down. ‘I'm not really hungry anyway.’

‘Don’t be like that’ Elaine said firmly. ‘You need to eat something. You don’t eat properly, its not good for you you know?’

She pressed a button on the microwave and turned it on.

‘We left some over for you. Don’t look surprised’ she told Leroy who didn’t look surprised at all. ‘We caring for you, we just wish sometimes that you would care more for yourself.’

Leroy sat heavily at the table. About a minute or so later Elaine took his heated food from the microwave and presented it to him, placing beside him a knife and a fork.

‘Be sure to eat all of it’ she sang to him, before giving him a kiss on the cheek and walking out of the kitchen.

‘Elaine’ Leroy spoke out.
‘Yeah?’ she gleamed, turning back to him and holding her hands before her happily.
‘I um…I've nearly save enough money’ he told her. ‘I can…I can move out soon…I’ll be able to buy my own apartment…my own place…I…won’t be here long.’
‘You don’t have to leave’ Elaine told him sincerely. ‘We would miss you.’
‘I know’ Leroy mumbled. ‘I just…I can’t live here for the rest of my life. I need my own place, and your parents…’ he fell silent.
Elaine continued to watch him smiling.
‘It’s not far away’ Leroy went on, ‘we’ll still be able to see each other.’
‘I hope so. You’ll have to show us when you get it’ Elaine grinned happily. ‘Just don’t forget about us. Ok?’
‘You know I never would.’
Elaine smiled warmly at him.
‘Goodnight then’ she said to him. ‘See you in the morning.’
‘G’night.’
She went away and Leroy was left alone.
He looked down at his food, and began to slowly eat.

Afterwards he washed up after himself, and went to his bedroom.
It was dark outside. He stood before the window, staring out at the street beyond. Everything was so still and peaceful.
Leroy lowered his eyes, sighing.
He raised his hands, closing the curtains. He dressed quickly and lay down in bed. The sheets were cold, but after a time, they began to warm as he hugged them tighter to him.
It took him a long time to sleep, a thing that had become normal. He often struggled to sleep, often waking early, often feeling restless, never knowing what to do with himself, not knowing how to keep his mind occupied. Most days he was bored. People tried to engage him in activities, drinks, socializing, but he was never interested in any of it.
Leroy let out another heavy sigh, closing his eyes and thinking about work the next day.
It took him hours to sleep, and the next morning, he woke before his alarm went off.

‘Hello how can I help?’

He was in the office again answering a call, around him; many others were doing the same, or working on their computers.

‘Of course’ Leroy said. ‘I’ll see what I can do.’

He finished late again that day, but instead of going home, we went to visit a property agent.

‘We’ve several apartments available locally’ the man was telling him. ‘Did you have something specific in mind?’

‘No’ Leroy shook his head. ‘It’s just for me. I just want something small.’

They made an appointment to meet for next week to view a property available in the area. Then Leroy went away.

He went to visit Mustang again, and as he did so many times before, he just stood before the grave, staring down at it.

It was beginning to get dark was someone called out to him, breaking his trance.

Leroy blinked, raising his head slowly and looking away, towards the figure that had spoken.

He recognised Sam as he came running closer, waving at him merrily as he went.

‘I thought I might find you here’ he gasped, slowly to a stop before him.

‘What happened to you?’ Leroy asked him, seeing the fresh bruises on his face.

‘Oh this?’ Sam beamed happily. ‘Well I uh…I finally told him to leave.’ He smiled. ‘He didn’t like that at all.’

‘Are you ok?’ Leroy asked.

‘Yeah I'm peachy’ Sam replied with a cheesy grin.

Leroy gave him a peculiar expression, before letting out a heavy sigh, smiling to himself weakly.

‘You're a strange one’ he said turning away and looking back to the grave again.

‘Strange?’ Sam echoed. ‘Am I?’

‘Hm.’

‘So who was he?’ Sam asked tentatively, looking at the grave also. ‘Alphonse Peterson…’

‘He….’ Leroy began tentatively.

He huffed, eyes lowered to the floor.

‘He was my boyfriend.’

Sam turned to him with wide eyes.

‘He died three years ago’ Leroy mumbled. ‘It was…sudden…for me…I…’ he drew a slow breath. ‘He was sick for a long time and I had no idea. He kept it secret, he never told anyone.

I came to this town to try to find him…after he left one day without a word.' He paused. 'By the time I found him…it was already too late.'

Leroy reached inside his jacket then, pulling out a small picture in a simple black frame. The photo was of a young man with short black hair, handsome features, and a sly grin. He looked happy.

It was Mustang.

'This is him' Leroy mumbled, 'back before met him.'

'I'm sorry' Sam muttered. 'I know what it feels like to lose someone you love.'

Leroy put the picture away again, turning now to face Sam.

'What did you want?' he asked him. 'Why are you here?'

'I wanted to see you.'

'Why?'

'Because' Sam began sheepishly, '…I like you.'

Leroy stared at him, an expression of confusion and uncertainty on his face.

'You……*like* me…?'

They went for a drink together after that, and Leroy sat in the coffee shop with Sam, seated at a small table in the corner, each with a drink before them.

'Mmmm' Sam lifted his cup to his lips and breathed deeply, closing his eyes as he did. 'Delicious…'

He took a sip, before placing the drink back on the table.

'I just love hot chocolate' he grinned childishly. 'It's so sweet and tasty.'

Sam faltered then, seeing the expression on Leroy's face.

'What's wrong?'

'Why did you say before that you liked me?' Leroy asked him.

'Because I do' Sam answered, dabbing his mouth clean with a napkin.

'I don't understand' Leroy mumbled.

Sam grinned at him, crossing his arms and leaning forwards on his elbows.

'I want to have sex with you.'

Leroy's heart twisted in his chest, and he stared at Sam in horror. One or two other people nearby cast glances over at them, and Leroy for a moment thought he must have heard wrong.

'You what….?'

'You heard' Sam gleamed slyly at him. 'I…' he began, 'I think you're really handsome.'

Leroy stared at him, suddenly a thought struck him.

He smiles just like Tess he realised, putting a hand to his head. *Why am I thinking of her all of a sudden?*

'Listen' Sam said, 'I should be going now. Could you walk me home?'

'Um…' Leroy mumbled. 'Alright.'

'Great' Sam beamed, rising from his seat. 'Come on, I'll show you where I live.'

They left the coffee shop together, Leroy walking a few steps behind Sam, staring at the back of his head.

What's with this kid? He wondered to himself, as Sam ahead of him walked with a spring in his step, whistling a tune and smiling as he walked with his hands in his pockets.

A sudden thought struck Leroy then.

Live your life as you should, not how others want. Live in the moment.

'Sam wait!' Leroy called out.

Sam paused, glancing back at Leroy in surprise.

'I…' Leroy started, stepping closer to him and speaking. 'I think I like you.'

'You do?' Sam said, eyes growing wide as he beamed back at him. 'Really?'

He squealed then like an excited school girl, bouncing on the spot and shaking his balled fists excitedly before him.

'I'm so happy!'

'Sam' Leroy said, shifting on the spot and moving closer to him. 'Can I……can I kiss you?'

Sam's eyes grew even wider still, and he stopped what he was doing, quickly falling silent.

The sun was setting behind them, and as Leroy reached out to take Sam by the arm, Sam tilted his head back, closing his eyes and allowing Leroy to kiss him.

Their lips touched, and Leroy held him there, his grasp on Sam's arm tightening a little.

He leant back slightly, but Sam wanted more. He stood on his tip toes to reach Leroy, opening his mouth this time as he kissed him again. Leroy opened his mouth too feeling Sam's tongue on his own, his soft and tender touch, his gentle kiss.

Sam put his heels on the ground again, gasping and smiling up at Leroy.

Leroy looked down at him, still holding his arms, though gently now.

Leroy grinned, the edges of his eyes crinkled, as tears ran down his cheeks.

'I want to be happy' he said to Sam. 'I want a new start. I *need* a new start.'

'Yeah' Sam mumbled. 'Me too.'

Leroy let out a breath, stepping forwards and enveloping Sam in a firm embrace, Sam lifted his arms, holding him back, breathing in the scent of his clothes.

'It feels so strange' Leroy spoke quietly, 'to hold someone else like this.'

‘Yeah’ Sam grinned, hugging Leroy tighter now, ‘but it feels *good*…’

Leroy went home with Sam that night. Sam lived in a shared house, but tonight it was empty.
‘They’ve all gone out clubbing’ Sam explained, closing the door behind Leroy as he entered.
‘How come you didn’t go?’
‘Because I wanted to be with you’ Sam gleamed.
Leroy’s heart skipped a beat in his chest, and he began to feel a strange elation within him, something he hadn't experienced since he first realised his feelings for Mustang.
‘So um…’ Sam began awkwardly, hunching his shoulders and suddenly averting his gaze as he held his hands behind his back. ‘We won’t be disturbed if that’s what you’re…’
Leroy stopped his words with a kiss, pressing his body against Sam’s and pinning him against the wall.
Sam moaned as Leroy held him by the wrists, his grasp firm but gentle, he let out a gasp and Leroy nuzzled into Sam’s neck, nibbling at his ear, and running his tongue down his neck, biting his shoulder gently.
Leroy stopped then, leaning back slightly, gazing into his eyes.
Sam smiled.
‘My room is upstairs’ he said to him breathlessly. ‘Do you want to…’ he trailed off, but didn’t finish his sentence.

Sam took Leroy by the hand, walking upstairs with him.
Sam opened the door for Leroy, closing it quietly once they were both inside. He leant back against the door, smiling at Leroy shyly.
Leroy watched him; reaching out to Sam and grasping him by the front of his shirt, pulling him towards him before turning, and pushing him slowly back onto the bed. He crawled forwards, leaning over him on all fours.
‘Are you sure you want to do this?’ Leroy asked him.
‘Yes’ Sam breathed. ‘I want to…love you…to feel you…’ he smiled. ‘I want this’ he whispered, ‘I want to…feel you inside me.’
Sam reached up, brushing Leroy’s cheek tenderly, running his fingers through his hair, before letting his hand fall back down to the bed, laying there beneath Leroy, calmly, simply waiting.

Leroy leant forwards, caressing Sam's cheeks with both hands as he moved forwards, his lips hovering over Sam's. He paused only briefly before kissing him.

Sam moaned as Leroy moved his tongue inside him, grasping Sam's arm with one hand, and with the other, slipping beneath his belt.

Sam broke away from him, craning his head back, his body shuddering, his breath in shallow gasps.

Leroy withdrew his hand, unbuckling Sam's belt, with the other hand he lifted Sam's shirt to expose his bare chest.

'You're so handsome' Leroy whispered, running his tongue across naked skin. 'So perfect.'

He leant back, sitting up so that he could see Sam's face clearly.

'Don't worry' he said. 'I won't mark you.'

'I wouldn't mind if you did' Sam mumbled back, cheeks flushed as Leroy continued to touch him down below, caressing him so tenderly. 'I am yours…' he breathed, 'after all…'

Leroy pulled his hand back, grasping the top of his trousers and pulling them down, freeing Sam from them and throwing them aside.

He leant over Sam again, kissing him briefly, before whispering into his ear.

'Turn over.'

Sam did so, and Leroy ran his hands over his body, nuzzling into his shoulder and smelling his scent as he unzipped his own trousers.

'Relax' he told him. 'I'll be gentle.'

Sam drew a sharp intake of breath, balling the sheets up in his hands as Leroy pushed forwards, reaching further into him as he leant over Sam, weaving his fingers between Sam's, as he moaned in pain, and in pleasure.

Leroy's body began to sweat in the hot room, but he did not slow his pace as he thrust into him.

Leroy continued, enjoying every inch of Sam's body, owning him. Controlling him.

He quickened as he began to climax, throwing his head back as his finished.

They lay on the bed together after that, holding each other close.

'I love you Leroy' Sam told him. 'I love you...'

Leroy squeezed him tighter, closing his eyes content as he felt a strange emotion inside at hearing these words.

‘I know’ Leroy whispered quietly to Sam.

‘Can you…’ Sam began, ‘stay here tonight?’

Leroy held him close, resting his forehead against his.

‘Yeah’ he said at last. ‘I can.’

Chapter Twenty Seven

Leroy was woken a short while later by a sound.

He furrowed his brow, shifting in his sleep and groaning. He opened his eyes to darkness, hearing sounds coming from downstairs.

He listened, hearing a girl’s voice calling out, then another, then the sound of the front door slamming loudly.

Leroy’s heart began to skip nervously as he listened to the sounds of two pairs of footsteps coming up the stairs, the voices laughing and giggling drunkenly. Leroy glanced to Sam who was sound asleep beside him, dribbling happily.

Leroy frown at him in amusement, feeling a surge of love towards him.

Suddenly the door to the bedroom was kicked open, and Leroy sat bolt-upright.

‘SAAA-AAM!’ came a sing-song voice before the lights were turned on.

Leroy shielded his eyes, squinting at the brightness before looking back towards the door, seeing a pair of girls, both extravagantly dressed in gothic clothes with their hair tied up.

‘Oh’ the one that had spoken said, hand going to her mouth as she saw Leroy there in bed.

Then her expression turned sly.

‘Sam…’ she teased, ‘I didn’t know you had *company,* and *what* company!’

Sam groaned, sitting up beside Leroy who sat there nervously, eyes wide.

‘Mearah’ Sam groaned rubbing his tired eyes, ‘…what the hell?’

Mearah had blonde hair tied in pigtails, beside her, her skinnier friend had blood-red hair and heavy dark makeup around her eyes.

‘So who’s this?’ Lilith her red-haired friend asked pointing at Leroy.

‘Is he a one-night stand or your main man?’ Mearah asked.

Leroy glanced uncertainly at Sam who leant into him, his heart skipped a beat as he saw Sam's naked flesh, covered only from the waist down by the blankets.

'This is Leroy' Sam gleamed happily, hugging his arm. 'He's my boyfriend now, I love him. Now get out we want to sleep.'

'I get all giddy when you take control like that' Leroy smirked.

Without warning then Sam pressed his hand on Leroy's chest, pushing him back down onto the bed and rolling on top of him.

'Sleep' Mearah spoke flatly. 'Yes.'

'Out' Sam barked, glancing around as Leroy lay beneath him, pinning him down with his hands around his wrists. 'I have unfinished business.'

Mearah and Lilith sniggered, leaving the room swiftly and snapping the door shut.

'But we…' Leroy stammered, '…finished last night.'

'I'm hungry again' Sam gleamed, giving him a predatory smile.

Leroy felt his heart skip a beat as Sam released his hold on one of Leroy's wrists, not wasting time as he reached around and down, grasping Leroy firmly between the legs. Leroy flinched, closing his eyes in pain, before opening them, squinting up at him.

'I'm not just the receiver' Sam sneered at him, 'I'm a giver too.'

Leroy moaned in pain as without warning Sam pushed his fingers into him.

'Stop' he gasped, 'the others will hear.'

'You think what I do is the worst thing that gets heard in this house?' Sam asked still playing with him. 'Leroy. Come on. We are all young and horny here.'

Leroy breathed in shallow gasps, heart racing in his chest and staring through teary eyes to the ceiling as Sam leant over him, lifting his leg over.

Sam bit his neck savagely, hooking his arm around Leroy's leg and lifting to get better access as he positioned himself.

Leroy tilted his head down at Sam who paused only for a moment, before pushing himself in.

Leroy grimaced, tensing and grasping the bed sheets as he moaned in pain.

Downstairs, Mearah and Lilith sat at the kitchen table in silence, happily listening to the sounds of the old and creaky bed upstairs.

The next morning, Sam woke early.

He turned over, facing Leroy in bed.

'Hey Leroy. Hey. Hey. Hey Leroy. Hey.'

'Mmmmm' Leroy groaned in annoyance.

Sam glanced down Leroy's body, reaching out to grab his buttock.

'Juicy.'

Leroy opened his eyes, glaring.

'No!' he snapped suddenly wide away, slapping Sam's hand away. 'Not again I'm tired…god you've got some appetite.'

He closed his eyes again, before opening them seconds later.

'What?'

'I'm just….' Sam moaned, looking sad and adorable at the same time, '…I'm just so horny. I need a good seeing to.'

'No' Leroy said.

'But…'

'No!' Leroy snapped. 'Jeez you're going to kill me.'

And then there came Mearah and Lilith's muffled shouts from downstairs.

'Go on! Do it!'

'Get it on! We want to hear it!'

Leroy groaned as Sam shrugged apologetically at him.

'Sorry' he grinned sheepishly, 'this is an old house; you can hear pretty much anything anywhere.'

'No' Leroy groaned in agitation, closing his eyes again and turning away. 'I'm tired Sam.'

'Then can I suck you off?'

Leroy opened his eyes, seeing Sam leaning over him hopefully.

He let out an exasperated sigh, rolling onto his back.

'Fine' he grumbled.

'Yay!' Sam cried happily.

Leroy let out low breath, lying on his back and closing his eyes as he felt Sam's lips close around him, trying to ignore the cheers coming from downstairs.

Sam worked for a few minutes, teasing him, licking him all over.

'Sam…I'm close…'

Sam began to quicken his pace, Leroy suddenly grabbed him by the hair, groaning just as he came, then letting out a deep breath.

Sam leant back, his lips sliding off the end. He opened his hand before him, coughing into his palm and wiping his mouth.

'There' he smiled, 'that's better.'

He reached for the towel beside the bed, wiping his hand on it.

Leroy sat up quickly, kissing Sam tenderly, holding him close.

‘I love you Sam’ he whispered. ‘I love you…’

Sam grinned happily, hugging him back.

‘I love you too Leroy, and good morning!’

‘Morning’ Leroy chuckled.

‘Hey’ Sam urged, ‘I'm hungry; let’s go get some breakfast together, okay?’

Leroy yawned widely, running a hand down his face.

He saw Sam sitting beside him, completely naked in the morning light. He looked so cute there like that.

‘Come on’ Sam hastened, leaping from the bed and reaching for his clothes.

Leroy rose from the bed, pushing the sheets back and swinging his legs over the edge, leaning forwards with his elbows on his knees.

‘So who were those girls last night?’ Leroy asked him.

‘Mearah’s my housemate’ Sam informed him. ‘Lilith is her friend. Then there’s Garry, his room is downstairs, he’s hardly ever here though. And then Peter, he’s probably at his university now, he’s really smart, he’s got tons of coursework and exams and stuff.’

Leroy stood, stretching with his arms above his head.

‘Hey’ Sam winked, gazing hungrily at Leroy’s naked body. ‘Nice.’

Leroy lowered his arm, reaching behind him for a pillow and throwing it at his face.

‘Enough’ Leroy ordered. ‘Now let’s go downstairs. I think it’s time you introduced me to your housemate properly.’

Sam led the way down the stairs as they headed to the kitchen, Mearah and Lilith were sitting at the kitchen table, staring towards the door as the pair entered.

‘Hey boys’ Mearah winked at them both.

‘Hey Mearah.’

‘So who’s your friend?’ Mearah asked, as Lilith beside her leant forwards on the table with a sly smile. ‘Introduce us properly.’

‘This’ Sam beamed, indicating Leroy who stood beside him. ‘This is Leroy, we’re going out now.’

‘So you ditched that other one at last?’ Lilith spoke up.

‘Yeah’ Sam nodded, ‘Leroy is much nicer to me.’

Leroy glanced to Sam, feeling warmth within his heart.

‘You’ll look after Sam won’t you?’ Mearah said to Leroy. ‘He’s been through so much, he deserves to be treated right.’

‘Yes’ Leroy nodded, ‘I know, and I promise…’ he reached towards Sam, putting his arm around his shoulders and pulling him close, ‘I love Sam, and I would never hurt him.’

As he spoke, Sam turned to gaze up at him, eyes shimmering.

Mearah smiled in satisfaction at this, rising to her feet.

‘Lilith and I have got to go out now’ she said, taking Lilith’s hand and kissing her on the lips, ‘we have things to do.’ She paused, looking at Leroy intently. ‘It was nice to meet you’ she said to him, ‘I hope we can see each other again soon.’

She smirked at Leroy as she walked out of the kitchen without another word.

Leroy and Sam turned, watching as the two girls left the house. The door closed, leaving the two alone together. It was quiet in the house once more.

‘She seems nice’ Leroy said, referring to Mearah. ‘Is she um…are she and Lilith together?’

Sam smirked. ‘No, she’s not gay…she’s bisexual, she…’ he pondered as he thought of the right word. ‘She’s in an open relationship’ he finished. ‘She has a boyfriend.’

‘Hm’ Leroy raised an eyebrow.

‘So what do you want?’ Sam asked him, ‘cereal? Toast?’

They ate breakfast, then after that, they went to the living room to sit.

‘Don’t you have work or something?’ Leroy asked Sam. ‘What do you do for a job?’

‘Oh, I work in a supermarket. I'm pretty good at my job…but I can only work part-time.’

‘Why is that?’

‘Well’ Sam shrugged shyly. ‘It’s hard to you know? I mean I've tried, but they're just not offering the hours I need. It’s hard sometimes’ Sam said as he sat down at the sofa picking up the magazine from the table and leaning back. ‘I can just about afford rent, but money is tight…you know?’

‘So the others won’t be coming back for a while will then?’ Leroy asked.

‘No’ Sam mumbled, looking at his magazine. ‘They’ll be ages.’

Leroy sat next to Sam, staring down at his knees as Sam flicked through the magazine happily beside him, completely distracted.

Leroy turned towards Sam, listening to him as Sam hummed to himself. Leroy watched him closely.

His eyes were bright, and a smile played about his lips. Though there didn’t seem to be anything in particular that made him smile.

Sam paused suddenly; he stopped humming as he turned to face Leroy.

‘Are you alright?’ he said happily.

‘Yes’ Leroy said. ‘I just…’ he reached towards him.

Sam blinked as Leroy touched his face. His skin was so soft, so tender.

‘You're so cute’ Leroy said to him.

Sam’s expression lit up, and he looked even more beautiful.

Leroy leant forward then, kissing him lightly.

Sam closed his eyes, kissing him back.

Leroy moved back then, staring into Sam’s pretty blue eyes.

‘Sam?’ he spoke gently to him. ‘Can I do more than just kiss you?’

Sam blinked in surprise, eyes wide as he hesitated for a moment.

‘Yes’ he said after a few seconds. ‘I want you to.’

Leroy raised his head, brushing Sam’s face with the back of his hand before kissing him again.

He pressed his hand against Sam’s shoulder, pushing him gently back upon the sofa and leaning over him.

The magazine fell to the floor.

His kisses travelled along Sam’s jaw line and down his neck and his hand reaching up to his chest, slowly one by one unbuttoning his shirt.

Sam moaned, arms raised above his head and hands touching the arm of the sofa as Leroy licked his chest, biting his tender skin lightly.

‘Ah…’ Sam breathed, as he felt Leroy’s touch.

‘I won’t mark you’ Leroy whispered back. ‘I wouldn’t mark such a delicate thing.’

Leroy moved his head further down Sam’s body, kissing his stomach, as he slowly unbuttoned his jeans.

Sam tensed then, shifting slightly as Leroy slowly unzipped him.

Leroy sat back, pausing as he glanced up at Sam.

Sam’s chest rose and fell slowly as he drew deep breaths, his cheeks were flushed. Leroy felt a sudden strong lust rise within him as he gazed down at Sam lying there on his back, arms above his head and shirt open, revealing his lean frame.

Leroy raised his hand, running his fingertip over Sam’s belly, before moving down, and slipping his hand into his trousers.

Sam tensed then, breath caught in his throat, he let out a moan, drawing a shuddering breath then.

Leroy caressed him gently, leaning over him as he worked.

‘Sam’ he spoke tenderly.

Sam opened his eyes, gazing up at Leroy. He gave a nod.

Leroy withdrew his hand, grasping the top of Sam’s jeans with both hands and pulling them down.

Sam let out a breath as Leroy moved his hand over Sam again, feeling him, stroking him, moving his hand up and down rhythmically.

‘Oh Leroy…’ Sam a gasped.

Leroy looked at him, tilting his chin down and lowering his head.

Sam gasped then as he felt Leroy put his lips around him. He gritted his teeth, then moaned, gasping deeply, speaking softly his name.

‘Leroy…’

Leroy moved his head up and down, tasting him, feeling him at the back of his throat as he sucked, his rhythm becoming faster and faster.

‘Leroy’ Sam spoke firmly now, his body stiffening, back arching. ‘Let go…I'm going to…’

‘Come if you want’ Leroy mumbled before continuing.

Leroy became forceful now, moving back and forth quickly.

Sam craned his head back, gritting his teeth as he came.

Leroy let out a moan, leaning back and coughing.

He wiped his mouth, looking back up at Sam and smiling.

Leroy washed up, and afterwards they sat together on the sofa.

‘So um…’ Leroy began. ‘How long have you lived here?’

‘About a year or so’ Sam beamed happily. ‘I've lived in loads of different places. I had to leave the last house I rented because the landlord sold up. It was tough, but I found a place to stay.’ He grinned. ‘I rather like it here, in fact I would even go so far as to say that this house is the best I've stayed in so far. Everyone here is so nice to me…we’re like a family…even through we’re not related.’

‘What about your own family?’

Sam stared at him.

His smile faced from his lips.

‘My family…’ he bowed his head, composing himself, before looking back up again. ‘They were murdered.’

Leroy’s heart plummeted in his chest and his eyes widened at he stared at Sam.

‘…what?’

‘They um…’ Sam looked away. ‘It was…’ he sighed, blinking slowly. ‘It happened a long time ago, one day…I went out with some friends…and…when I came home I…’ he gritted his teeth, balling his fists and he fought back tears. He smiled then, eyes crinkling at the edges, even as the tears rolled down his cheeks. ‘No’ he spoke to himself forcefully, wiping them away. ‘They would want me to be strong.’

Sam took several calming breaths, before continuing.

‘I lost my entire family in one day; it was…a friend of the family…supposedly. I was spared, only because I went out last minute, he knew I was supposed to be home that day…but a friend called last minute and invited me out, so I left…I….’ he drew a steady breath. ‘I was out for hours. When I came home…there were…police….’

‘What happened?’ Leroy asked tentatively.

‘The man…who did that…we all knew him well…but…I never got closure for what happened, I….I never….’ Sam paused then. ‘He killed my family…then killed himself…no one ever found out why…then after that…the friend who invited me out that day…invited me to live with him…because I was only near seventeen, he was a little older and…he helped. But after a time he became possessive and violent.’

‘The one that hurt you…’ Leroy said. ‘Is he the one I saw?’

‘Yeah’ Sam replied. ‘I was in a relationship with him for a long time, but it took even longer to leave him, he was possessive of me but…I eventually managed to move out into a shared rented place, it was only after you met him that he left me alone for good…you know…after you hit him.’ Sam paused. ‘He hit and beat me so often for so long…and no one ever hit him back, he would only hurt those weaker than him. I loved him once, even though I knew what he did to me was wrong….but I tolerated it…because he helped me…because I loved him…’

‘How?’ Leroy breathed. ‘How can you still smile, when so much bad has happened to you?’

‘I am happy’ Sam answered, his eyes shining, ‘because that is what my family would have wanted…and I have much to be grateful for, because I am still alive…and I will see them again one day…’

Leroy went home alone later that day, and was immediately greeted by Elaine.

‘Leroy! There you are. Where have you been? I was starting to get a little worried.’

‘Elaine’ Leroy breathed, smiling at her, ‘I…’

She blinked curiously at him too, a smile playing about her lips now.

‘What is it?’ she asked him. ‘I've never seen you smile like that before.’

‘I've…’ Leroy continued, ‘I've met someone…’

The next day, Leroy invited Sam to his new apartment.

‘I haven’t moved in yet’ Leroy was saying as he turned the key in the lock, Sam bouncing up and down excitedly beside him, ‘but technically I own it now, all the paperwork is filled in and all that.’

The instant he opened the door, Sam shot through it, standing in the living room and gazing about him wide-eyed.

‘Waaaaaaw’ he breathed. ‘It’s amazing.’

It was a fairly new block of flats, built only a few years ago, like the other apartments, this one was small, yet it had everything you could need with a kitchen and bathroom of modern design.

‘I love it’ Sam said, moving from one room to the other.

‘I haven’t bought any stuff yet’ Leroy was telling him, as Sam continued to gaze all around him. ‘I've only got a sofa and bed.’

‘That’s all we really need’ Sam mumbled.

‘Hm?’

‘So um…why exactly are you showing me this?’

‘I um….’ He began. ‘I was wondering…you don’t have to but…’

‘Yes?’ Sam urged, quivering with excitement. ‘What were you wondering?’

‘I know you like it where you live now’ Leroy told him, ‘but I was wondering if you wanted to live here with me.’

Sam gasped, his wide eyes began to shimmer with tears.

‘Oh Leroy…’

He threw himself into him, burying his face in Leroy’s chest.

‘I've never been so happy in my life…’

‘S-so…’ Leroy stammered, ‘so you’d like to? I mean I know we’ve only been together a short time but… I think this could be a good thing…live in the moment you know? I had hoped you wouldn’t mind leaving your shared house…you did say you liked it a lot.’

‘No…’ Sam whispered, looking up at Leroy, still hugging him, ‘…it’s perfect…’

Leroy grinned at him awkwardly, pushing him away lightly and sitting on the sofa.

Sam sat on the sofa next to him, leaning towards him and speaking clearly.

‘Let’s do it!

Leroy blinked at him.

‘W-what?’

‘Do you love me?’ Sam pressed.

‘Well…yes…’

‘Then let’s do it together, right here right now!’

Leroy turned his head away from him, blushing slightly.

‘I'm not a machine’ Leroy mumbled. ‘I can’t just turn it on and off.’

Sam grabbed his upper arms suddenly.

‘Then let me turn it on for you.’

He kissed him then, Leroy surprised for a moment did not respond.

And then Sam crawled forwards, climbing onto Leroy’s lap, continuing to kiss him, never breaking away.

Leroy kissed him back, closing his eyes and sighing in pleasure as he felt Sam’s tongue.

Sam broke away from him then, moving his lips to Leroy’s cheek, then down to his neck.

Leroy turned away from him, exposing his neck further to Sam’s lips.

Sam raised his chin, nibbling Leroy’s ear.

‘Ah!’ Leroy said suddenly, jerking sharply away from him. ‘What are you doing? Don’t stick your tongue in my ear!’

‘Sorry’ Sam whispered, clapping his hands over his mouth, ‘I didn’t mean to…’

Leroy shoved him off his lap then, and Sam landed ungracefully on the floor.

He picked himself up, staring at Leroy wide-eyed.

He gasped then as Leroy made a start for him, grabbing him around the waist.

‘No!’ Sam cried dramatically as Leroy lifted him over his shoulder. ‘Put me down! Help!’

‘Quiet!’ Leroy snapped back, carrying him out of the room. ‘And stop squirming. You started this…now I'm going to finish it…’

Leroy carried Sam across the room, doing so easily as Sam was only light in weight.

He reached the bedroom, closing the door after him and throwing Sam roughly onto the bed.

Sam propped himself up on his elbows, watching as Leroy moved closer.

Leroy kissed him, kneeling before Sam and holding his head in his hands gently.

Leroy leant back, gazing into Sam’s face. Sam’s eyes shimmered, and his cheeks were flushed.

Leroy pushed Sam back onto the bed, hand going to unbutton Sam’s jeans.

‘Wait’ Sam whispered, touching Leroy’s chest and pushing him back gently.

‘What is it?’

‘I want to look at you…’

Sam reached up to him, brushing his hair back and running his fingertip down the side of Leroy's face.

'You're so handsome…'

'And you're so cute…' Leroy replied.

He grasped Sam's hand, holding it to his cheek and closing his eyes as he breathed deeply.

'Can I undress you?' Sam asked.

Leroy smirked. 'Yeah' he said.

Sam sat up, unzipping Leroy's hoodie, and slipping it down his shoulders, grabbing Leroy's shirt, lifting it over his head and throwing it away.

Sam touched his hand to Leroy's naked chest, breathing slowly as he gazed at him.

Sam let out a deep sigh, resting his cheek against Leroy's chest, hearing his heartbeat. He stayed this way for a moment, one hand touching Leroy's chest, the other resting upon his thigh.

Leroy bowed his head slowly, running his hand up the back of Sam's neck and into his hair.

'My turn now' he whispered, stripping Sam of his shirt so that he could see his naked skin.

He pressed his body against Sam's, pushing him back down upon the bed, Sam allowing him to do so, as Leroy rested his body weight upon Sam's.

Sam turned his head so that his mouth was hovering right over Leroy's ear. He spoke in a seductive voice.

'My body is ready for you.'

Leroy turned his head away sharply, sniggering under his breath.

'Silly boy' he whispered back to Sam. He turned to face him again. 'Turn over.'

Sam obeyed, resting on his hands and knees now. Leroy finished unbuttoning Sam's trousers, pulling them from him, before unbuttoning his own.

Sam let out a slow breath as he felt Leroy's hand upon his back. Sam lowered himself so that he rested on his elbows.

'Are you ready?' Leroy asked him, one hand running down Sam's spine, the other resting on his naked thigh.

Sam pursed his lips, nodding once.

Leroy saw. His grip tightened suddenly on Sam's body, and he slowly pushed himself forwards.

Leroy's hand went to hold Sam by the shoulders as Sam let out a moan; he pulled back slowly, before pushing forwards again.

Sam stayed on his elbows as Leroy continued his gentle rhythm, holding him tenderly.

‘Are you alright?’ Leroy asked him after a time.

‘Stop’ Sam told him suddenly.

Leroy froze.

Sam turned back to face him. ‘I want to look at you.’

Leroy hesitated. He pulled out, rolling Sam onto his back and pulling him back to the middle of the bed.

He bore over him, hooking his arm around the back of Sam’s leg and lifting it up.

He pushed into him again.

Sam grimaced then. Leroy paused, waiting for him to relax.

Sam looked at Leroy, eyes shimmering and cheeks red.

‘Leroy…’ he whispered.

Leroy leant forward to kiss him, pushing harder into Sam as he did.

Sam broke away with a gasp as Leroy pulled back again, before pushing into him again.

‘I love you Sam’ he whispered to him, thrusting into him, harder and harder.

‘I…’ Sam gasped, ‘I…’ he moaned then, throwing his head back and closing his eyes as Leroy began to quicken his pace.

He reached his arms up as Leroy went faster and faster, holding him around the back of the neck as Leroy pushed into him one last time, finally finishing.

Sam’s nails dug into his shoulder, body tense.

Leroy let out a deep breath, pulling out and collapsing on top of him, skin beaded with sweat.

‘Leroy…’ Sam breathed, arms moving around his body in a firm hold. ‘…I love you so much…’

Leroy turned to face him, kissing him again, before moving off him and resting on his side beside Sam.

He nuzzled into Sam, hand going around his waist and pulling him close.

‘I'm so glad we met’ Leroy told him, ‘…so glad…’

‘Me too’ Sam gleamed, before becoming still.

Leroy watched him closely before closing his eyes as Sam had done, and falling asleep in minutes, holding Sam close to him as he dreamed.

The next morning when Sam woke up, he found himself alone.

He looked at the bed beside him, seeing an empty space, then glancing about the room, but Leroy was not there.

He got up and dressed quickly, leaving the room and padding carefully down the corridor. He paused suddenly, hearing the sound of someone crying.

He approached the living room, reaching a hand out and pushing the door open slowly.

He saw Leroy sitting with his back to him, shoulders wracked with sobs.

'Leroy…?' Sam spoke tentatively.

He whipped around, red eyes wide with surprise to see him there.

'What are you doing up so early?' he mumbled, turning away again.

'Why are you crying?' Sam asked.

'It's nothing' Leroy told him wiping his eyes.

'What have you got there' Sam asked, suddenly noticing Leroy holding something.

'Nothing' Leroy snapped trying to hide it.

'Tell me' Sam ordered, lunging forward to grab it from him.

'No! Sam!'

Sam grabbed the picture from him, stepping back away from Leroy's reach and to a safe distance.

He stared down at the picture as Leroy watched him uncertainly.

Sam looked up again, meeting Leroy's gaze.

'This is Mustang' he said.

'Yeah' Leroy mumbled, voice husky. 'I…' he was about to say more, but fell silent quickly.

Sam handed the picture back to him, turning he marched out the room.

'I have to go' Sam told him shortly. 'I've got work today.'

'Sam wait!' Leroy called after him, but he was gone, leaving swiftly through the front door and snapping it shut without another word.

Leroy stared at the closed door, feeling a tug in his heart. He let out a heavy breath, tears shimmering in his eyes as he stared at the picture in his hand, smiling weakly.

He stared at the handsome face within the frame, that gorgeous carefree smile.

Leroy gritted his teeth, placing the picture on the side.

He got ready for work, leaving quickly, along the way he tried to ring Sam, but he never picked up.

With a sigh of regret Leroy pocketed the mobile, entering the office building to begin work.

That day was gruelling for him, as he couldn't get Sam out of his mind, constantly worrying for him.

I hope he's alright…I hope I didn't hurt him or push him away.

Leroy tried again several times in his break to ring him, but again there was no answer.

As his shift ended, Leroy left quickly without speaking to anyone, as he usually did.
It was on his way home that Leroy saw something that made his heart stop in his chest.
Across the road he saw Sam in the arms of another man, and kissing him passionately.
Leroy's brows furrowed, and he snarled as he was consumed by a sudden rage. He strode across the street, ignoring the cars that honked and screeched to a stop to avoid him.
Sam glanced to the side upon hearing the cars, eyes widening in shock and surprise at seeing him there.
'Leroy…what…?'
Leroy gave no explanation or warning as he approached, balling his fist and swinging it back. He punched the other man hard in the face.
The stranger fell back against the railings, hunched over and holding his face with both hands.
He straightened suddenly, glaring at Leroy. 'What the hell man..?!'
Leroy grabbed the front of his shirt, pulling him close and snarling in his face.
'Get out of here' he hissed. 'Now.'
He shoved the man back, the stranger hesitated for only a moment, unnerved by Leroy's rage.
He turned and marched away, sparing only a single glance back at Sam before leaving.
Leroy watched him go.
'Leroy' Sam said behind him. 'What are you…?'
Leroy turned and slapped him suddenly, cutting off his words.
Sam stared in shock, head turned to the side and cheek burning.
He looked back at Leroy as he grabbed him by the shoulders, speaking to him angrily and shaking him with every word.
'What are you doing?'
'Me?' Sam said, tears brimming in his eyes. 'What about you?'
'What?'
Sam's expression grew angry, and he shoved Leroy sharply back then, freeing himself from his grasp.
'How can you say that you love me?' Sam demanded, his lip beginning to tremble. 'How can you say you love me and cry over the picture of another man.'
Leroy stepped back in shock, blinking several times as he slowly processed what Sam had just said.
His words had been like a physical blow to his chest.

‘You say you love me’ Sam told him, crying openly now, ‘and yet you carry *his* picture wherever you go…’

Leroy pursed his lips, shoulders relaxing slightly.

‘I think we should talk’ he spoke calmly.

A short while later, the two of them sat together in the park, resting upon the grass at the base of a large tree. The pond before them was still and calm.

‘I first met Mustang about three years ago’ Leroy said in a flat voice. ‘He kissed me the very first time we properly met…I was engaged then……her name was Alyssa…it didn’t work out in the end. I left her…because I loved *him*, and was rejected by my family because of it.’

Sam sat beside him, leaning back against the tree and hugging his knees to his chest, he stared at the grass sulkily as he listened to Leroy talk.

‘At first I hated him, I hated Mustang. He was so irresponsible, so annoying…the way he lived…he just didn’t care about anything…and now I know why.’

Leroy let out a steady sigh, closing his eyes.

‘I know now why he lived the way he did, why he put himself in danger, why he lived wild…it’s because he was dying.’ Leroy paused, grasping his hands together before him, opening his eyes again. It saddened him to remember Mustang, to remember the love he had lost. But he could not bring himself to cry. He had shed so many tears the past three years, there were no more tears left inside him to cry.

‘There was one day that changed my life. I remember…in school…I was sitting exams in the hall along with everyone else.’ Leroy felt a stab of fear in his heart at the memory, at how close to death he had come to. ‘There was a mad man who stormed into the school with a gun, he shot a bunch of people…before coming into the exam hall.’ Leroy drew another breath to steady himself. ‘I remember…I was at the front of the hall…that man…he grabbed me, pointed his gun at me…I thought I was going to die…’

Sam turned to face him now, eyes wide as he listened silently.

‘Mustang ran from the back of the hall, grabbing the man’s gun…he was without fear.’

Leroy stared at the grass beneath him, eyes out of focus.

‘I remember…he grabbed the man’s gun, pulling it away from me. The man shot him, then again…Mustang nearly died that day…he was hospitalized…and it was that day I realised…I realised….’ He bowed his head. ‘I began to have different feeling for him from that day on…I…I realised I loved him…but I didn’t know how to express those feelings…they felt so strange and foreign to me. But…he helped me.’

Leroy fell silent for a moment then, Sam was about to break the silence, but then Leroy spoke.

‘I loved Mustang’ Leroy said. ‘I truly did with all my heart and soul.’

He pulled the picture out from his jacket then, the one he carried everywhere, the one of Mustang in his younger days.

Sam glanced up as Leroy rose to a stand, walking with his head bowed towards the edge of the lake, holding the picture in both his hands.

Leroy raised his head then, drawing his arm back he threw the picture as hard as he could, watching as the picture sailed through the air, landing near the centre of the lake.

Sam gasped then, rising swiftly and running to him.

‘Leroy’ he breathed. ‘Why did you do that…?’

Leroy turned to him, smiling widely. ‘Listen to me Sam’ he spoke to him, grasping him by the shoulders lightly and speaking to him softly. ‘I loved Mustang once. But I don’t love Mustang anymore. He is my past…*you* are my future. I love you and you alone. No one else.’

Sam gritted his teeth, balling his fists and hunching his shoulders as his eyes began to water.

He rushed up to Leroy then, embracing him tightly, stifling his sobs as he buried his face in his chest.

‘I'm sorry’ whimpered. ‘I'm sorry…’

‘It’s ok’ Leroy said to him, pushing him back gently and brushing his tears away so he could see him clearly.

Sam looked up at him, smiling.

‘Does that mean we’re going out now?’ he asked Leroy tentatively. ‘Like…a couple…like…boyfriends…?’

‘Yes’ Leroy grinned, amused at the awkward way he had spoken. ‘I am done grieving now’ Leroy said. ‘You are all I care about. We are a couple now, its official.’

‘Can we move in together?’ Sam asked suddenly.

‘What?’

‘I'm not happy with seeing you everyday’ Sam said to him. ‘I want to see you every night and every morning too…will you let me live with you? I'm ready to leave the shared house…I want a home only with you now…’

‘Of course’ Leroy cried happily, hugging him with joy. ‘I would love that so much!’

They walked hand in hand through the park, coming to rest on the lip of a small hill that overlooked the lake.
Leroy stared at the glassy water, eyes bright in the fading day, smiling warmly to himself.

I will never forget Mustang, It's because of him that I met Sam; it's because of him……that I found true happiness

'Leroy?' Sam spoke, looking up at him. 'Are you alright? What's wrong?'
'Nothing' Leroy smiled, placing an arm around Sam and pulling him closer. 'Everything is perfect.'

A lot has changed throughout my life, and I haven't always been as happy as I am now.
I love Sam dearly, he is everything to me.
But my story began not with him, but with Mustang, who made me realise…what life truly means, and how precious it is…how we should cherish every moment.

Live your life as you should, not how others want. That is what he taught me.
Live in the moment.

We never know what the future might bring, and Sam and I may not be together forever. But thanks to Mustang, I've found true happiness.

Thanks to Mustang

I am alive